LENTALA

OF THE SOUTH SEAS

W·C·MORROW

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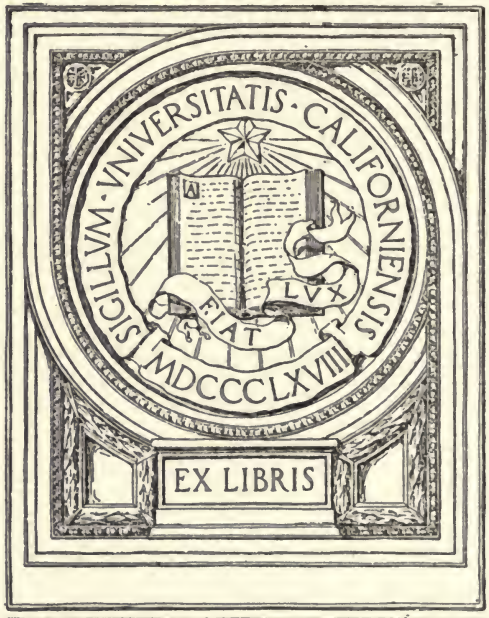

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To

M. Ambrose Bierce,

with the best wishes of

His friend,

W. C. Morrow.

San Francisco, December, 1905.

LENTALA
OF THE SOUTH SEAS
THE ROMANTIC TALE OF A LOST COLONY

By W. C. MORROW

THE ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM OIL PAINTINGS
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TO MAIL
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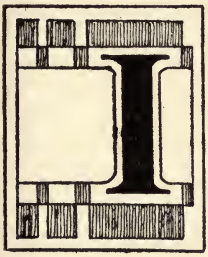
Chapter I. *On Unknown Shores.* Pursued by Our Dying Ship. Cast Away Among Dangers. A Pointing Finger and a Sword. Beguiled by Savage Royalty. A Strange Girl and a Prediction.



N range of my outlook seaward as I lay on the yellow strand was a grotesque figure standing near and gazing inland. His powerful frame was broad and squat; his long arms, ending with immense hands, hung loosely at his sides; his hair was ragged; and out of his blank face blinked small blue eyes wide apart. So accustomed was I to his habitually placid expression that the keenness with which he was looking roused me fully out of the lethargy into which extreme exhaustion had plunged me.

"Well, Christopher!" I said with an attempt at cheerfulness.

The strange look in my serving-man's eyes did not disappear when he turned them on me at my greeting, but my glance at the forest discovered nothing alarming. It was useless to question Christopher; he would take his time.

I rose with stiffened members. The wretched, beaten colonists were prone along the beach, all sleeping except Captain Mason and Mr. Vancouver. With silent Christopher shambling at my heels I passed Mr. Vancouver as he sat on the sand beside his slumbering daughter; he was watching the sea more with his blue lips than his leaden eyes. I gave him a cheery greeting,

since it was no time to harbor old scores. The effort failed; he only blinked at me. Already I had suspected that his quarrel with me because Christopher had stowed away on the vessel was merely the seizing of an opportunity to rupture the strong friendship between Annabel and me.

Even at a distance I had seen that Captain Mason's spirit was hunting the waters, as he stood apart in a splendid solitude, arms folded, and towering in the dignity of a gladiator who might be disarmed, but not conquered. Never had I seen a profounder pathos than his when, finding the *Hope* foundering and helpless, he had ordered her abandonment and sent us into the boats. Then had come the most haunting thing that ever a sailor experienced.

It was the pursuit of us by the dying barkentine. What sails the last storm had left played crazy pranks with the derelict. With no hand on her wheel the rudder swung free. We were rowing northwestwardly, with the wind, and thus it was that the *Hope*, thrust by wind and wave, followed us, with wide swerves, with lungings and lurchings, now and then making a graceful sweep up a swell and then a wallowing roll to the trough. The fore-and-aft sails were gone, but some of the square canvas held; and the sheets flapped with a dismal foolishness between accidental fills. It was the drunken plunging of the hulk in deliberate pursuit of us that appalled. She snouted the water swinishly; she reeled and groveled under the seas that boarded her. Through it all, whether she was coming prow first, beam on, or stern foremost, and no matter how far she would veer, she clung to our course, shadowing us, hounding us, as though imploring our help.

In all the fury of the storms, from their first assaults at Cape Horn to their beating us down in the South Seas, Captain Mason had not faltered; he fought desperate odds with the cunning and valor of Hercules. But this careering mad thing, stripped of the grace and dignity of a sane ship,—this staggering, sodden monster, mortally stricken and dumbly floundering after the master who had abandoned her that she might go down alone into the deep,—was more than the man could bear; and he had sat staring in the boat, Christopher and I rowing, while we dodged the barkentine's blind assaults. We were still bending to the work when darkness fell. It was then that the wind died, and we saw her no more.

Captain Mason showed relief at being dragged back into the living world by our approach.

"No sign of her?" I asked.

"Not from here. The view is shut in by those promontories," indicating two headlands embracing our beach.

"Then," said I, "Christopher will scale one of them and I the other."

There was a faint twinkle behind the seaman's look, and something else, which recalled what I had seen in Christopher's face as he gazed at the forest.

"I imagine you haven't slept much," I said, knowing his anxiety on the barkentine's account.

"How could I, Mr. Tudor, when she had been following me like that?"

"Then you have already been up there to see if you could find her?" I ventured.

He looked amused as he drawled, "Not all the way," and gave Christopher a look that appeared to be

understood. His gesture swept the heights on either side and the richly verdured mountains that began to spring in terraces a short distance from the beach. "This is a tropical region," he went on, "and those trees bear lively fruit. It is brown and carries swords. I didn't get all the way to the headland."

I understood, and inquired, "Did they speak?"

"No. A pointing finger with a sword behind it needs no words."

I wondered where we could be, that armed natives should exhibit a hostile attitude. "Where are we stranded?" I asked.

"I don't know. It has been weeks since I could even take a dead reckoning, and we've been blown far since then. My instruments disappeared while I was exploring this morning."

"And we are without food or weapons," I added, feeling a thrill at the prospect of measuring forces with an obscure menace.

Mr. Vancouver had loaded the barkentine with every possible means of defense, subsistence, and development, but we had fallen on an island far short of the one in the Philippines which he intended to colonize. The fate of the *Hope* was a vital matter. Most of her precious cargo was behind bulkheads. If she had not gone down, very likely she would drift to this island and yield her resources to any enemies we might encounter here.

Christopher was gazing at the forest again. I could see only deep shadows and brown tree-boles under the leafage. Birds of brilliant plumage were flitting among the trees, and the warmth of the sun bathed us in sweet, heavy odors.

"They are coming, sir," said Christopher.

I observed a slow undulation in a wide arc among the shadows. A tree-trunk in the outer edge apparently detached itself, then advanced into the open, halted, and raised a sword. Five hundred other shapes came forth from the wide semi-circle touching the shore at either end. Some bore swords, others spears, and still others knotted war-clubs. The soldiers were brown and bareheaded, and the dress of each was limited to the loins, except that of the leader, the man who had first stepped out; he wore a sort of tunic or light cloak, and a head-dress, both gaudily illuminated with feathers.

Captain Mason stood motionless.

"What shall we do?" I impatiently cried.

Christopher left us and rapidly roused the sleepers. He must have dropped reassuring words, for the stir proceeded without panic, though all could see the advancing threat, which approached with an ominous deliberation.

"Do you think it's to be a slaughter, Captain?" I asked.

He gave no answer, being evidently stunned. I turned to Christopher as he rejoined us. Many a time since I had rescued him from a mob of boys in a Boston street, taken him to my lodgings, and made him my servant, his strange mind had seemed able to penetrate baffling obscurities. At such times he had a way of listening, as though to voices which he alone could hear; but with that was an extraordinary reticence of tongue, and often an indirection that had tried my patience until I learned to understand him as well as an ordinary mortal could.

"Are they going to kill us, Christopher?" I asked.

He was in a deep abstraction, and I knew he was listening. "Sir?"

That was his usual way of gaining time, and I had learned to wait.

"Are they going to kill us?"

"Kill us, sir?"

"Yes."

"You are asking me, sir?"

"Yes. Are they going to kill us?"

"Not now, sir," he firmly answered.

The glance which Captain Mason and I exchanged was one accepting Christopher's opinion and groping for what lay beyond it.

With some accuracy of maneuvering, the leader aligned his soldiers, stepped out after halting them fifty yards away, and stood waiting, obviously for a parley. He was showing impatience as Captain Mason still stood motionless.

"Some one must meet him," I said. "It will never do to show timidity. You are the fittest."

"These people are strange to me," he replied, "and I don't know how to proceed. They have an appearance of ferocity that I have never seen in these seas. Many outside men must have drifted to this island, but I'll warrant that none ever left it, for I've never heard of anything that looks just like this. I imagine it is the graveyard of the unreported wrecks that happen in this part of the Pacific."

I was surprised at the grayness in his face and the glaze in his eyes. What could our two hundred and fifty men, women, and children, helpless as they were, do without his shrewdness and courage?

"Then we have all the more to do," I urged.

He squared himself, and said: "We three will meet them. Put yourself forward. Your height and strength will impress them."

It looked odd that he did not include Mr. Vancouver, the leader of our enterprise, and Lee Rawley, the aristocratic and disdainful young lawyer whom Mr. Vancouver hoped that Annabel would marry.

Meanwhile, the leader of the savages, a man of commanding size and manner, had been growing more impatient, and was putting his men through some manual that hinted at barbarous proceeding; but when we started he desisted, and met us with urbane gestures. Then ensued a struggle to find a means of communication. Both Captain Mason and I knew something of the Pacific languages, he from a sailor's experience and I from having fought as a first lieutenant in the Philippines during the war with Spain; but apparently our combined resources failed. Finally we caught a Spanish word and then a German. It remained for Christopher to discover that the embassador spoke some pidgin-English with his tongue and all languages with his gestures. Thus we learned that the gracious King Rangan had sent Gato, commander-in-chief of the army, with an escort of honor to conduct us to the imperial presence.

Captain Mason and I carefully avoided each other's eyes. The tomb-like mask that Christopher knew how to wear was on his face.

As there were two armed savages to each colonist throat, there was nothing to do but accept. In a dismal procession guarded by the soldiers, we labored through the sand and sank into the scented forest.

After a walk through fragrant aisles of shade and color, we came upon a wide sweep where the undergrowth had been cleared away; in its place was a cluster of huts made of bamboo and thatch. The central space was occupied by one more imposing than the others. The matting curtain at the door was drawn aside after we had been seated before it on the ground, and a sturdy figure, followed by a striking retinue, came forth and took an elevated seat on a platform extending from the house.

The king's gorgeous robe of a light fabric adorned with feathers and embroidered with gold was worn with a knowledge of its impressiveness. A wide band of gold embedded with gems served for a crown; the blazing scepter and massive wristlets and anklets were of like materials; the ears and fingers flashed with jewels. The royal face was benignant. Gato stepped forth to interpret, as the king's immediate followers, dressed in long embroidered garments of native texture, ranged about the throne.

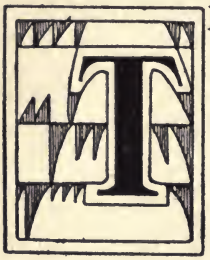
The attendant swinging a large feather fan over the king's head was the only woman discoverable. There was a striking difference between her and the men. It was manifest in a prouder poise of the head, in a look of higher intelligence, and in a finer definition of features. The eagerness with which her glance ran over us, a shyness that struggled with an impulse to a bolder scrutiny, combined with a certain refinement of bearing to set her apart. She was raimented with no less barbaric splendor than the king and his immediate attendants, but in better taste. Her brown bare arms and neck were turned on the graceful lines of youth, and her wrists and hands were small. Her hair, instead of

having the glistening blackness of the men's, housed some of the sun's gold; and I was startled to discover finally that her eyes were a deep blue.

At last her roving glance was caught and held by me. In her eyes was a moment of hungry inquiry. She caught her breath; a break came in the regular swing of the fan, and her eyelids drooped.

My fascinated attention to her was diverted by a deep rumble. King Rangan was speaking.

Chapter II. *The Falling of a Long Night.* A Royal Feast. The Fan-Bearer's Significant Conduct. A Gloomy Forecast. Had Any Before Us Escaped? The King's Promise. Prisoned in Paradise.



The interpreter made a genuflection to the throne, and beckoned to Captain Mason and me. I thought that Mr. Vancouver ought to be included, but the skipper ignored my inquiring glance, and stepped forward. After bowing, we stood waiting.

The king gave us a shrewd look. Then his eyes blazed, and he ripped out something to the interpreter. I discovered the cause. My faithful Christopher had brought up his prodigious strength for a possible emergency, and it was clear that the king was offended by the grotesque figure.

The interpreter hesitated, for he knew Christopher's speech-value, and the king snapped out another command. I knew it was an order that some shame be put upon Christopher. At that my muscles hardened, and I stepped protectingly before him. The fan over the king's head abruptly stopped. The leader raised his hand, and a dozen of his men advanced.

Dimly aware that Captain Mason was employing some pacific measures, I was more concerned by Annabel's surprising act. Her eyes shining and her cheeks aglow, she briskly came up, laid her hand on Christopher's arm, and sweetly said:

"Come and stay back here with us."

His pathetic look went questioningly from her to me, and he held his ground. I glanced round to see what next the king would do. With astonishment or wonder the fan-bearer was staring at Annabel, who made a striking picture; then she whispered into the royal ear. In a milder voice he said something to the interpreter, who by a gesture to us indicated that the king was satisfied. At a word from me, Christopher came and stood beside me.

His ostensible purpose proved to be merely a formal welcome, an ascertainment of our origin, purpose, and disaster, and an invitation to a feast.

As the others of the colony were in too dull a state to give attention, the king confined to us three a shrewd scrutiny. But Captain Mason and I, feeling that the welcome was only a sheathed sword, held blank faces, and did not even pass a glance of understanding; and Christopher could be depended on under all circumstances to give no betraying sign. The one thing to do was to show a grateful acquiescence. The time for planning would come when our people were capable of thought and action,—if we should be spared that long.

It was indeed a feast. The smoke which Christopher had seen rose from a barbecue, at which fresh meat and fowls and fish had been deliciously cooked. The completeness of the preparations indicated that they must have been begun immediately after our landing. Fragrant boughs were spread on the ground near the barbecue trench, and on them we seated ourselves. Plantain leaves made excellent platters. Roasted yams, bread made of ground seed or grain, and fruits of many kinds, were served in abundance.

The effect was magical; the down-hearted took cheer, and laughter ran through the trees. Much of the transformation was wrought by the solicitous attentions of the servers; but more cheering was the gracious friendliness of the king, who, besides personally directing the service, mingled with us in a democratic way, yet with no sacrifice of dignity.

Most fascinating to me was the fan-bearer. Whereas the warriors stood in awe of his Majesty, she treated him with almost a flippant disregard. She went among the colonists, keenly anxious that all should be pleased, her face breaking into bewitching smiles, her mischievous eyes dancing, her musical laugh rippling. The distinction in her manner as she had stood behind the throne was augmented in the modest abandon of her rôle of hostess. The alertness of her glance, the joyous spirits that bubbled out of her light pose and movement, her sprite-like airiness, her obvious efforts to restrain an instinct to play, to tease, to get into mischief, a running over of kindness and happiness,—these and more elusive qualities set her apart from the men and made them look dull and sordid.

Her greatest interest was in Annabel, the only highly cultured woman in our party, since the colony was composed of workers in practical industries. The two girls had no language in common, and appeared sharply different in temperament and training; yet there was visible between them a bond of feminine sympathy such as no man can understand. It was curious that the savage one was not abashed before her highly civilized sister. In the gentle eagerness with which she served Annabel, frankly studied her, and courted her notice, was something that looked

pathetically like the yearning of a starved soul for what Annabel had — the enjoyment of a birthright. Annabel appeared to see that longing, and she stretched forth a friendly hand into the fan-bearer's darkness.

Captain Mason, Christopher, and I formed a group. Despite the grief and anxiety on the sailor's face, he betrayed his share of the sunshine that the girl bestowed on all. She came to us often, and there was a touch of shyness not visible when she flitted among the others. Virtually ignoring me, she gave some attention to the captain, and was particularly solicitous toward Christopher. She stuffed him, and laughed at him. Christopher enjoyed it, gazed up into her sparkling eyes, and strained his ribs with the food that she coaxingly urged upon him.

On one of her visits I smilingly handed her a little pocket toilet-case which I carried. She took it gingerly, examined it curiously, and with childish interest inspected its contents. Her surprise at discovering the mirror was not so great as I had expected, and did not look quite sincere. She held it up, made a grimace at her reflection, thrust out at it a tongue as sweet and pink as a baby's, tossed the kit back at me, and went dancing off in a swirl of laughter.

Presently she demurely returned on a pretense of looking after Christopher's wants, and of a sudden, brilliantly smiling, held out her hand for the trinket. I gave it to her. Her eyes fell when I looked up closely into them, and in agitation she thrust the case into her bosom. I discovered that Annabel was curiously observing her.

Captain Mason gazed thoughtfully after her as she left, and remarked:

"That girl is going to be mixed up with our fate."

"What do you make of her?"

"An eaglet hatched by buzzards."

Christopher's evident regard for her was dazzled wonder.

"You like her, Christopher?" I asked.

He was serious at all times, and much of his gravity was sadness. He nodded impressively.

"Yes, sir."

"She has fed you well."

"Yes, sir." He spread his immense hands over his stomach.

"I'll ask her to bring you some more," I said.

His face showed alarm. "Don't, sir! I'd shorely bust."

"But you wouldn't have to eat more, even if she brought it."

"Yes, I would, sir."

"Why?"

"I'd jess *have* to, sir." This with a solemn helplessness.

"He has taken her measure," dryly remarked Captain Mason.

He had found opportunity to study the splendid jewels so abundantly adorning the king and the girl.

"Those gems," he said, "were cut by European lapidaries."

There was a disturbing suggestion in his words, but I could not define it. This island had received rich treasures from civilization. Here was a mystery.

"How do you account for them?" I asked.

"The typhoon makes many wrecks. There's no knowing what shores they crawl up on to die."

"Yes; but you see that although our ship was wrecked, we came ashore. Survivors of other wrecks likely have had the same experience."

"No doubt."

"Then, why haven't they given out news of this island? It is evidently very rich, and ——"

He gave me an obscure look, and turned away with the remark:

"I think you'll find the reason in a few hours."

He must have felt the hurt in my silence, and opened a confidence on another tack.

"You have noticed, Mr. Tudor, that there are no women, children, nor domestic animals in this village. Do you infer anything from that?"

"What is your inference, Captain?"

"The village is not inhabited. The natives live back of those mountains to the west. This is merely a receiving-station for wrecks and castaways."

The shrewdness of the king was not hidden by his hospitality. I did not overlook the inquiries that he made among the colonists with Gato's help, nor his private colloquy with Mr. Vancouver, nor the thoughtful look of that gentleman when it was over.

The banquet was ended; the colony was reassembled before the throne; the king, backed by his now sedate fan-wielder, seated himself; and Captain Mason, Christopher, and I stood ready. We were made to understand the following:

We had not been invited to this island, but the misfortune that landed us on it would be respected. Two circumstances ruled the situation. One was that no vessels from the outside world ever put in here, and hence our means of escape were restricted to such

resources as the king might devise; the other, that our intercourse with the people would not be permitted beyond a certain limit. The king explained that in youth he had gone abroad and found that the ways of white people were not suited to the islanders, who would be demoralized should they come under our civilization.

At intervals he sent his people, two or three at a time, in a small boat to the nearest islands, some hundreds of miles away, with native products for barter. But so great had been their precautions that the situation of the island had never been discovered. In these boats one or two of us would be taken away at a time, and thus placed in the path of ships that would assist us homeward.

In order to keep us isolated from the people, we were to be conducted at once to a pleasant valley, which would be free to us for our exclusive use. Natives skilled in farming would be furnished us for a time as instructors; but it would be expected that we should pledge our honor not to make any attempt to leave the valley without permission.

Every heart among us sank. A deep look was in Captain Mason's eyes. It was on the end of my tongue to say, "Captain, let him know that we can make our own vessels and leave in them;" but a glance at him informed me that he had forgotten nothing, and that anything but a cheerful acceptance of the old bandit's conditions, until we might devise and execute plans of our own, would precipitate immediate disaster. And then I understood why the captain had asked no question about the barkentine.

He said to me, under his breath:

"You have an easy tongue. We must keep our people blind for the present. Brace them up and flatter the king."

The colonists were in the apathy of weariness and repletion. The glow with which I put the situation to them was barely needed to secure their acquiescence.

I turned to the king. Only with difficulty could I see him clearly through the intensely dramatic picture made by the girl. All through the conference I had seen her intense anxiety. What did it mean? With her sweet audacity, she might have made some sign. As I read her conduct, it betrayed a terrible uneasiness lest we refuse or were ungracious. Clearly she was greatly relieved by our acceptance.

I thanked the king and gratefully accepted his proffers. He then informed us that we should immediately be conducted to our valley, made comfortable, and supplied with everything needful.

The cavalcade, conducted by the armed guard, started through the enchanted forest, and mysteries throbbed in the very air. Never had I seen so pathetic a spectacle as this draggling procession of civilized people marched as dumb cattle to the shambles by a horde of savages.

Captain Mason, Christopher, and I stood apart as the others filed past. The man of the sea was in a deep reverie.

"If the king," I said, "has been so careful to conceal this island from the world, why should he plan sending us away to betray it?"

Captain Mason gave me a slow look.

"Do you think that he intends to send us away?" he asked.

"If not, he hasn't sent other castaways off, and we'll find them here."

Again that slow look, but I felt that it saw too far to include me. He shook his head, and said, as though talking to himself:

"Now begins the great struggle. We'll be patient—and ready. That girl is our hope."

The king descended; the fan-bearer, her face mantled with content, disappeared within the administration hut and dropped the curtain. The rear guard were waiting for us three, and we started. After a few paces, I turned, and saw, as I had hoped to see, a brown face watching us through the parted curtain, and it was filled with more mysteries than any enchanted forest ever held.

On and up we went, and finally reached the summit. We stood on a small open plateau, which abruptly ended in a precipice. Before us was a giant chasm in a great tableland of lava. The floor was a thousand feet below. We were looking down on it from the top of the great wall of columnar basalt which enclosed it. The chasm was an irregular ellipse, some three miles on its minor axis and five on its major. The floor was level, and, except for some farms, was covered with a forest. A breeze sent long, unctuous waves of lighter green rolling over it, or swirling in graceful spirals where the wall deflected the wind and drifted it on in majestic eddies.

In splendid contrast to the deep, warm colors below was the gloomy black of the mighty enclosing rampart. Near the upper end a beautiful stream, nearly a river in size, made a wild, joyous leap over the brink. A lake into which the water plunged sent up clouds of

mist, out of which sprang a rainbow. From the lake ran the stream of molten silver which swung lazily on its shining way through the valley till lost in the distance. The leader of the guard announced that the valley was our destination. I was dumb in the grasp of its witchery, but a quiet voice brought me back:

"As good a prison as another." Captain Mason had spoken.

"Why, man," I cried, "that is Paradise!"

"No doubt; but the flaming sword will keep us in, not out."

During the march I had not failed to keep Christopher in the corner of my eye. I had been trying to read in his face one of those flashes of insight which his fine instinct sometimes threw into dark places. He had held his listening attitude often since I found him standing beside me on the sand. It had given his face a certain leaden alertness, which, as we beheld the valley, slowly faded into the habitual blankness, and I saw that it was useless to question him.

We descended through a steep, narrow cleft, and were marched through a forest to the stream. A rude bridge bore us across, and there we found a large number of natives rapidly and skilfully building us a village of huts made from logs, boughs, and thatch. From all indications, they must have begun the work almost immediately after we landed. Large stores of food and other necessities had been accumulated; nothing needed for our comfort and sustenance had been neglected.

As soon as the soldiers had helped us bring order to the camp and the building of the village was finished, they and the workmen melted away in the twilight.

Chapter III. *The Menace of the Face.* Accepting the Challenge. The Threat. What the Face Saw on the Bluff. A Mysterious Visitor. The Fan-Bearer's Conspiracy.

Captain Mason and I occupied the same hut, but we held no converse that night before falling into heavy slumber. Christopher insisted on sleeping outside the door. If any of our party had thought it prudent to appoint a watchman, no suggestion to that effect was made; but there was no knowing what responsibilities Christopher assumed.

The sun was looking over the great wall when we assembled for breakfast. Every one had a brighter appearance. I had never seen men so terribly cowed as these since the storms had beaten them down. The women had looked beyond the hopelessness, and had tried to sustain the courage of the colony. Every man was now beginning to hold up his head.

Some of the despair had melted from Mr. Vancouver's face; it was clear that the lion in him was feebly straining. Mr. Rawley was recovering his aplomb. Annabel, having in her bearing an added depth and sweetness, had undoubtedly done much to accomplish that result with the two men, for there was something pathetic in the tenacity with which they clung to her.

On the barkentine, before the elements became destructive, she had been aloof toward the other

women and the children; but on the beach, at the feast, and on the weary march to the valley, she had given a cheering smile, word, or deed to those about. The promise thus made was meeting fulfilment this morning. She had assumed charge of the breakfast preparations, and, seeing that Christopher yearned to do kindly service, had made him her executive. I often caught her look of wonder at his unfailing intelligence, patience, and gentleness in doing her bidding.

After breakfast the men began to talk among themselves. Captain Mason went over and said something to Mr. Vancouver, who shook his head, and the captain returned to me.

"Now that the men are rousing," he said, "it is time to organize. Mr. Vancouver declines to take the lead."

"You are the one for that," I declared.

"No. You have the military training and the tongue."

"But you have wisdom and a longer experience in discipline. Let's compromise. Take the leadership. I'll do your talking."

"Very well," he said. "There's no need to caution you, but the others ought to know; these trees may have ears We need organization for defense."

At the end of a heartening address to the colony I called for the selection of a president. Mr. Vancouver named Captain Mason, who was elected. I was chosen his assistant, to Mr. Vancouver's evident annoyance. Dr. Preston, a young physician, was made superintendent of the camp.

The men squared their shoulders; the women's faces brightened. In a few words I urged against any

restlessness, any plotting,—anything, in fine, that would have the faintest color of mistrust or disobedience toward the king. "Be patient. Hold together." That was the watchword.

Gato, the interpreter, soon appeared with a crowd of natives, and indicated that Christopher and I, with twenty picked men, should follow him. A short distance down the stream we came upon cleared land, and were given our first lesson in farming. Our men winced under this and the indefinite term of imprisonment which it implied. But the word was passed round: "Wait. Be patient." The one hundred and fifty intelligent American men of us would find a way to match any ten thousand heathen under the sun. Blessed be the American brag! It is the front of something good behind.

The lesson was concluded in the early afternoon, for the sun was growing hot. Gato led us down the stream a mile to a low ridge stretching across the valley. Not a break in the great wall enclosing the valley was visible, except the thin cleft which had given us ingress; but I reasoned that at the lower end there must be a gorge through which the stream issued, although no sign of it could be seen. Gato made us understand that this transverse ridge was the boundary of our freedom. He pointed out two landmarks springing from the walls and marking the terminals of the ridge.

The one on the far side of the river was a barren bluff; opposite it, and forming part of the wall behind, there suddenly appeared a hideous caricature of a human face, a ferocious gargoyle, rudely fashioned by nature from the upper front of the cliff, protruding

from the rock, and leering down horribly. It must have been a hundred feet from forelock to chin.

I withstood the shock badly, but was steadied by noting the deep satisfaction in Gato's eyes as he observed me. Unmistakably it was one of malignant triumph, instantly gone, but almost as disconcerting as the awful face itself. I felt that the ghastly apparition on the wall held a significance reaching the very depths of our fate. It was the embodiment of all the silent and implacable menaces hovering over the lethal fairness that environed us.

It had the blackish color of the rock, with reeking perpendicular streaks of green alternating with dull red. The forehead and chin receded in a simian angle; bulging eyes leered; below high cheek bones were mummy-like recessions, and hungry shadows filled them; the nose was flat, and the nostrils spread bestially.

Gato, informing us that his men would be on hand the next morning, took himself away. It gave a creepy sensation to note the snaky smoothness with which these men could sink out of sight.

Our party started for camp. A heaviness sat on me, and I did not wish to talk. Christopher and I fell behind, and the others left us. I could not bear that any but Christopher should see my perturbation. Several times I glanced back to see the face on the wall. Its malignancy grew even more terrible through the hazing distance, and I was glad when the forest shut it out. If the spectacle affected me so deeply, what greater hold must it not have had on the natives? And there was the significant look that I had caught from Gato.

On top of the opposite wall I discovered near the edge what appeared to be a large stone table, or altar, and its position with reference to the face suggested a sinister purpose.

Now that the men were gone, hopelessness fell upon me. Never had anything like such heavy responsibilities crept into my life. A sense of my inadequacy grew unendurable; and, overcome by weariness of soul and body, I flung myself on the ground and buried my face in my arm.

Christopher presently stepped away with a sprightliness quite unusual, but I had not the spirit to look up. Even returning footsteps and a low murmur of voices failed to stir me. I was recalled by Christopher's quiet remark:

"Some one to see you, sir."

I sat up, and discovered a native lad with him. His loose dress of blouse, trousers, and straw hat was of the commonest material. He was as unlike the native men as I had observed the fan-bearer to be, but his manner was shy and timid, lacking the careless defiance of hers. With a finger on his lips he beckoned us to follow him.

In a secluded spot a little distance away, we sat down. My first surprise was when he began to talk. In a musical voice, he groped for words that I could understand, and in that way used a polyglot language, some words badly pronounced, and others spoken with surprising correctness.

First, he enjoined secrecy, for should the king learn that he had come —— The lad finished with a grimace, and a swipe of the hand across his throat. He made me pledge the sun to burn me up, the moon to strike

me a stark lunatic, and the stars to pierce me with their lances, should I betray his confidence, — all this solemnly, but with a twinkle in the back of his eye.

Second, he was Beelo, brother of the king's fan-bearer, Lentala, a good girl in a way, but —— A droll shake of his head left her in the air. Lentala and he were protégés of the king and queen, and enjoyed uncommon privileges, having been members of the king's household since childhood. The queen was very sweet and gentle, and they were fond of her. She had no children of her own.

And, third, Lentala wished Beelo to come surreptitiously to me in order to learn English. She had a special reason for that. Neither the king nor any of the other natives must know. That was all. Would I teach him, that he in turn might instruct her?

Our conversation, carried on in a mixture of languages, must be here given in English.

"Indeed, I will, and gladly, Beelo!" I exclaimed; "but why not bring Lentala, that I may teach you together?" I seized his hand in my joy of this heaven-sent opportunity. It was a small, delicate hand.

"She *can't* come," he answered.

"Why not?"

"Why, — she's a girl!"

"But she might come with you." I was pleased with the discovery that the savage girl had the fine instinct which establishes self-guarding and self-respecting conventions.

"The distance is long. Girls have to wear skirts, you know, and girls are not as active as boys. Lentala, with her skirts, would be seen, and the king would find out. I can slip through anywhere."

I nodded resignedly. Only with the greatest difficulty could I refrain from asking him many questions; but how did I know that he was not a spy? In establishing relations with him I was playing with every life in the colony. I observed Christopher. His air of listening to distant voices was not present, and I felt reassured for the moment.

Beelo was anxious to begin; and he had his first lesson. Never had I found so eager and sweet-tempered a pupil, and his quickness was extraordinary. I drilled him first in the names of familiar objects.

"What is your name?" he plumped at me.

"Tudor."

"Tudor." He caught it with a snap, as though it were a ball. "You have another name?"

"Yes — Joseph."

He began a comical struggle with the J, laboriously twisting his tongue and lips as he pronounced the first syllable *Cho* as the Chinese, *Yo* as the German, *Zho* as the French, and *Ho* as the Spanish; but the English eluded him, and he gave it up, laughing sweetly. Often during the lesson I saw in his handsome deep-blue eyes — which were maturer than the rest of him — a dash of the mischief, the teasing, and the challenge that gave Lentala her sparkle.

"What is your name?" he demanded of Christopher, and pronounced it perfectly.

Christopher was gravely regarding the lad, who appeared disconcerted under the scrutiny. That disturbed me; but if the boy was seeking our undoing he would have to reckon with Christopher.

He was curious about Annabel, and sent her affectionate messages from Lentala.

"Beelo," I demanded, "where did you learn all those words from foreign languages?"

Taken by surprise, he was confused and a little frightened, and had the look of a child preparing a fib.

"Other people have been shipwrecked here," he answered, peering at me from under his brows. "I learned from them."

"What became of them?" I asked.

He raised his head, and answered, "The king said he sent them away."

"Did you visit them secretly?"

"N—o." He began to play with twigs on the ground.

"Were they herded in this valley?"

"No." His answer was firmer. "There was never more than one or a very few at a time."

I sat silent so long that he looked up, and showed alarm.

"Tell me the truth, lad," I insisted, holding his eyes. "Where did you learn those words?" A startling suspicion suddenly came. "The gold in your hair, the blue in your eyes, the fine lines of your face, ——"

He began to edge away, and I saw flight in him; but I caught his wrist.

"Tell me the truth," I repeated.

He gazed at me in fear and pleading, but found no yielding, and with provoking indifference shrugged his shoulders and settled down with a pouting, martyr-like resignation.

"You are hurting my wrist," he remarked.

"Answer me," I demanded, tightening my grip. "Hasn't white blood mingled with some of the native blood here?"

His lips were compressed under the pain of my clasp, and an angry resentment steadied his gaze.

"Yes!" he answered, and a sudden change lit his face, as I unprisoned the wrist. "Don't scare me that way again," he said, half impudently shaking his head at me.

It seemed best to desist from pressing the matter further, and pleasant relations were soon re-established between us; but the matter seated itself in a corner of my mind.

Our lesson was delightful, and time escaped more smoothly than we knew. Beelo glanced at the sky, and sprang to his feet. He sweetly smiled his thanks, seized one of Christopher's great paws and vigorously shook it, asked me and Christopher to meet him at the same spot tomorrow at the same hour, and was darting away. I called him back, and led him to an opening through which the face on the cliff was visible.

"What is that?" I asked, pointing to it.

He caught his breath, stood rigid, and slowly turned his face up to mine.

"That on the cliff? It is nothing — only stone."

"It is more," I insisted. "It sits there, it looks down threateningly on the valley; it says as plainly as speech ——"

"No, no!" cried Beelo, seizing my arm with both hands, and gazing up into my eyes. "It is one of the gods. The people invoke it — you may see the altar fire on the opposite cliff some night when there is a great storm and the sea is raging. The god brings fish to the king's net."

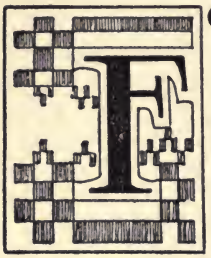
He broke off abruptly, and with alarm clapped his palm to his mouth. I put my hand on his shoulder

and smiled reassuringly. His manner grew composed, and he darted away and disappeared.

On returning to camp I told Captain Mason of the adventure. He was deeply interested, and sat in thought.

"You've struck a lead," he said. "Follow it—cautiously."

Chapter IV. *Behind a Laughing Mask.* Captain Mason Strengthens the Defense. The Extraordinary Behavior of Beelo. Christopher Becomes a Savage. Hidden Motives Half Disclosed. Hope.



Foreseeing the time when a visible danger would bring mob-madness to the colony, Captain Mason gave his entire attention to strengthening his control. To that end he kept every one engaged at something, laughed away all fears and doubts, placed all on honor not to breed discontent, and required that all discussions of the situation be with him alone.

He impressed the danger of leaving the camp limits except in large parties organized under his authority. No spying savages were ever seen in the forest backing the camp, but I frequently found the captain using his keen eyes in that direction. The questions weighing on him were: When would the king ask for the first member of the colony to be sent away? What plan would be adopted in the selection? What would really become of the persons so taken? What should be done when the first call was made for deportation?

Christopher and I alone were in the president's confidence. On the second night he informed us that he had selected a spot which would serve as a fortress if occasion rose, and instructed Christopher in the art of making weapons, chiefly stone-headed clubs and blackjacks. This work was done secretly in our cabin.

The daily teaching of Beelo developed a new interest

in the fact that, before I was aware, I was a pupil as well as a tutor, and that Beelo was as assiduous in instructing Christopher as me; he was evidently anxious that we should master the native language. I was glad to humor him, especially as I suspected an intelligent purpose. Above that was my growing affection for him. He perfected his poor English so rapidly that I was put on my mettle to learn the island tongue.

It was a simple task, and we came to use it entirely. To my surprise, Christopher learned it as readily as I. From the very start he had helped Beelo to turn the teaching in that direction. The strangest element of all this procedure was the quick and sure understanding that sprang up between these two.

Beelo one day brought a large parcel. He was particularly happy, and as full of play as a kitten.

"You can't guess what I have for you," he said with a mischievous look.

"No, Beelo — what?"

"You'll see." He was opening the parcel. "You and Christopher are going to be Senatras." Senatra was the name of the inhabitants.

He produced from the parcel two native costumes. In addition were a basin and some brown powder. The boy was in glee as he separated the articles into one array for Christopher and the other for me.

He ran to a little stream, fetched water in the basin, and with a comical seriousness dissolved part of the powder.

"Your arm, Christopher," he demanded. At times Beelo's manner had a touch of imperiousness that sat oddly with his youth.

Christopher obediently bared his powerful arm.

"Oh!" said Beelo in delight. "You have splendid muscles,—they are like iron; and you are very strong,—that's good." His finger was timid as it touched Christopher's arm.

He dipped a cloth in the colored water, and rubbed the stain on Christopher's white skin. His care and gravity in comparing the tint with the color of his own wrist, in shaking his head, in adding more pigment to the water and trying again, and at last his delighted satisfaction, were all very charming.

"Good!" he cried. "That's the Senatra color. Now," addressing me, "I'll go away a little while. You make a Senatra of Christopher." To Christopher: "Take off everything. Mr. Tudor will put the color all over you. Then you put on Senatra clothes, and whistle for me."

Patient Christopher would doubtless submit to any indignity that this prankish boy might devise, but I proposed to put a stop to the nonsense. Besides, how could I assume the ridiculous rôle that this young scamp, in whom my indulgence had bred impudence, intended for me?

"Christopher will do nothing of the sort," I peremptorily said.

The lad stopped short and looked at me curiously.

"I want to, sir," Christopher interposed, much to my surprise.

"You do? You wish to submit to this foolishness?"

"Foolishness, sir?"

"Yes."

He reflected a while, and then said:

"Perhaps it ain't jest foolishness, sir."

"Very well," I agreed, willing to humor him;

"but Beelo will stay here and put the color on you himself."

Alarm sprang to the boy's face.

"I won't!" he answered defiantly, and was turning away, but I caught him by the arm.

"You will," I said. "I'll see that you do."

He slipped from my grasp and stood away, laughing.

"I want to do it myself, sir," meekly said Christopher.

Beelo precipitately fled.

Why not play with these children? A man who would not was a churl. So Christopher was arrayed as a Senatra, and a whistle called Beelo back.

He danced delightedly round the pitiful figure that Christopher made. It hurt me to see not only how patiently Christopher submitted, but how wholly he entered into the spirit of the masquerade. His pale eyes looked ghastly in his brown face. I called Beelo's attention to that.

"Oh, that won't be seen at night!" he exclaimed. The remark did not impress me at the moment.

He put Christopher through numerous gaits and tricks of manner peculiar to the Senatras, and praised him for his aptness. Finally, when he taught his pupil the art of creeping stealthily and noiselessly, the man was so terrible that I forgot his grotesqueness.

All through this singular performance, Beelo, even though half playful, displayed astonishing perseverance and thoroughness, as if life itself depended on the perfection of the drill. That might not have looked so strange had it not been for the extraordinary care of Christopher himself to accomplish a perfect imitation. Then the significance of it all burst upon me.

I had vowed a thousand times since first knowing Christopher that never again would I underrate his wisdom, yet over and over I found myself doing so. While he never laughed in his romping with the children of the camp, but went into their sports with his habitual tender melancholy, he never showed with them the hidden eagerness, the almost desperate determination, that marked his training under Beelo. Thus I came to see that at the very beginning Christopher had discovered a vital meaning in Beelo's playing.

"And now," cried Beelo, "you will be a Senatra, Mr. Tudor! Christopher will dress you. Come!"

The boy's eyes softened in a moment under the new light that he found in mine.

"Beelo," I said, taking his hand, "let's sit down and talk." I seated myself, but he withdrew his hand and sat a little distance away. "No," I gently insisted; "here, facing me, and close."

He twisted himself round to the spot I indicated, and in doing so tossed Christopher a wry mouth. I noticed more clearly how fine his features were, and with what grace his long lashes curved.

"Beelo, do you really wish Christopher and me to be Senatras?" I asked.

He nodded, and, turning to Christopher, told him to go to the runnel, wash off the stain and put on his own clothes. Christopher meekly went. Beelo began playing with twigs on the ground, and did not look at me.

"Did Lentala tell you to do this?"

He nodded again—a little irritatingly, for he had a tongue.

"Why?" I asked.

He raised his eyes and regarded me steadily. Then, perhaps not seeing all that he sought, he made no answer, and returned to the twigs.

"I want to understand, Beelo, and you must trust me. Many things come to me now. Your sister's conduct at the feast meant that she wished us to obey the king. She showed us sincere kindness in every look and act. And her great difference from the other people,—her sweetness, her grace, her beauty, her brightness of mind, her altogether adorable charm,——"

Beelo blazed in a way that stopped my rhapsody. He had raised his face; his lips were apart; his eyes glowed with a proud light that moved me strangely.

"You like my sister?" he softly asked.

"Who would not?"

"But *you!*" The boy impatiently tossed his head.

The little gesture was so pretty that I involuntarily smiled. Beelo misunderstood. He flashed angrily, and resumed the twigs. I could only grope.

"I don't understand why the king sent us here. We are prisoners, and that is something which brave men won't stand. We would rather die fighting."

Again he studied me, and again looked down.

"Why didn't the king let us build boats, and leave?"

He gave no answer, but was very busy with the twigs. I wondered if I were rash in some of the things I was saying. Clearly the moment of confidence had not arrived. The boy was studiedly cautious.

"Beelo, go to your sister and beg her to come and see me. She will trust me more than you do. I know she is our friend. She would tell us what fate is awaiting us."

"No, she wouldn't," firmly interposed the boy.

"She would, because she is sweet and kind."

"No, she loves her people, and you might do them harm."

"But she sends you here to disguise us as natives and to train us in the art of deceiving and outwitting them."

Had his smile not been so winning I could have slapped him for his insolence; but it was soon evident that a mighty struggle was proceeding under his assumed carelessness. If I could only guess at its nature I might know how to proceed.

"Bring Lentala to me, Beelo. She would be safe with you, and she will understand and will trust me."

"Why? Her skin is brown. You would not trust her." He was closely observing me.

"What difference can her color make!" I impatiently retorted. "Lentala is an angel."

"But a brown skin means——" A look of horror swept over his face.

"Lentala is beautiful and kind and true. Tell her to come."

Beelo was silent.

"Why should she not trust me?" I persisted. "How could I harm her?"

The boy, nervously arranging the twigs, spoke rapidly, but did not look up:

"She's afraid,—not for herself, but her people. They love her. She would never betray them. Suppose she came,—you would be gentle to her; you would tell her she was beautiful and — and all that nonsense. You might try to get her to tell you things. And you would find out how to—— Yes, you might come back and plot with your men, and there would be a

great fight with my people and many would be killed. That would be terrible."

I dimly understood at last: Lentala would trust her brother, not herself, in the mysterious plan that she was working out.

Christopher had returned. I beckoned to him to sit with us.

"Beelo," I said, "look at me." He complied. "If Lentala were here she could read my heart. All that you have said means that she mistrusts me. I understand more than you think I do. You have already shown your confidence and Lentala's by offering to train me as a native. A wise and generous purpose is in that. By means of the disguise, you wish me to learn some things that will benefit my people, but you are held back by your fear that I will use the knowledge to injure you."

"No," he hastily interrupted; "only my people."

"Very well. But you have already shown trust. You simply want more assurance that I will keep faith with you. Tell me what you want. I will put my life in pawn,—I will give it, if that is demanded."

His deep eyes were profoundly fixed upon me. In that moment Beelo disclosed a soul that had found maturity.

"You would do all for your people!" he impatiently cried. "You think only of them! Lentala and Beelo may do everything for you, but you never think what you might do for—Lentala and Beelo."

The half-revelation in the passionate outburst brought me to my feet, and the lad slowly came to his.

"Beelo!" I said, "I hadn't thought it possible. You and she are the favorites of the king and queen.

You have everything you want. I don't understand. Trust me! I can be a friend."

He was looking up at me with eyes in which a pathetic anxiety struggled with fears. Instead of addressing me, he turned to Christopher and confidently took his hand.

"Christopher," he said, "do you like me — and Lentala?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Very much?"

Christopher solemnly nodded.

"If — if we want to go away with you and your people, would you take us?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And be kind to us?"

"Me?" He turned to me, and so did Beelo.

"Yes, Christopher."

"*He* will," was the answer.

Beelo, seized with one of his unexpected whirlwinds, threw his arms round Christopher, and laughed.

I turned him about, and, holding both his hands, looked smilingly into his brilliant eyes.

"Show me the way to serve you and your sister, Beelo," I said. "I alone, or Christopher and I together, will obey any instructions from you; we will do whatever you say, go wherever you direct, — cut ourselves off from every protection except yours. Isn't our trust complete?"

"Yes, Yoseph — Choseph," he banteringly answered. Then, in a flash, "I mean Mr. Tudor."

"Joseph — to you," I returned.

He put his mouth through contortions over the *J*, and finally, with a restful gasp, blurted out:

"Choseph!"

His gentleness overwhelmed me, and I, being naturally affectionate, and timid only with women, forgot my feeling of constraint toward him, and caught him in my arms. But he did not have for me the pressure and the laughter that he had given Christopher. On the contrary, he resisted and then sprang away.

I wondered what thoughts were perplexing him as he stood off, regarding me in his odd little quizzical fashion, and was astounded when he said:

"Lentala says that Annabel is beautiful and lovely."

I could not imagine what had suggested Annabel to him at this particular moment, but I hastily agreed. He seemed not altogether pleased, but went on:

"You like her very much?"

"Yes; very much indeed."

He looked a little sullen, but soon recovered, and broke out in a very rush of gay spirits. In a short time he suddenly became grave.

"I must go," he said. With a gentle, pleading look at me, he asked: "Won't you be a Senatra? Christopher will help you."

"Yes, Beelo, — anything you wish."

"Very well. I will come every day for — maybe three days, and teach Christopher. You will watch us. When you and Christopher are alone, he will teach you. But you must dress every time as a Senatra!"

"Of course." My relief was great. For some incomprehensible reason I did not wish the boy to train me, for that would have necessitated a disagreeable loss of dignity before him.

"Good! And in three or four days,"— an oddly embarrassed expression rose in his face,— "would you

like to go with me — you and dear old Christopher — to see — the beautiful — the kind — the true — Lentala?" He was mocking.

"Yes!" I answered, and made an effort to catch him; but he darted away, showering a cascade of laughter behind him.

So I was right in supposing that Beelo had been preparing us to penetrate the mysteries beyond the valley ramparts, and lift the veil behind which our fate was hidden.

"Christopher!" I cried in my joy, seizing him by the shoulder; "do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Chapter V. *The Opening of a Pit.* Insolence and Rebellion in Camp. A Riot Averted. I Train for a Dangerous Rôle. Plotting Among Us for the Destruction of the Colony.

When Christopher began my training and pursued it with such amazing thoroughness, my feeling of being ridiculous disappeared. My love of adventure in these preparations was mingled with other emotions,— the fascination of hazard, a wish to risk everything for the colony, and a strong desire to see Lentala and solve the mystery of her whole conduct. Beelo was a will-o'-the-wisp.

Complications arose in camp. Although I had taken care to exercise my authority in a bland way, it became necessary at times to be severe. My greatest difficulty was inability to find the source of a disaffection working insidiously among the young men. Captain Mason had not observed it, lacking my opportunity, and I decided to be more positive and to find evidence before laying the matter before him.

I was intimately thrown with the men by directing the work on the farm. The labor was exhausting on account of the heat. For this reason, and because some men could bear the work better than others, and liked it, I called out only volunteers; but selfishness on the part of some who shirked brought grumbling. At first I had supposed that this was the origin of the dissatisfaction, but presently a deeper cause appeared to be in operation. As a test, and to secure fairness, I adopted

a system of levying on all the able-bodied men and requiring each to do his share in turn.

In that way I came down on Rawley, who had never volunteered. When I informed him one evening that his turn in the fields would come next day, he stared at me in insolent silence.

That incident alone was not significant, but it made me alert, and I instructed Christopher to keep a strict and secret watch on the camp. A present necessity was to force the issue with Rawley, whose bearing was a threat to the harmony and safety of the colony.

He had not taken the trouble to absent himself from the tables when I called out the tale of men for the fields next morning, but lounged at indolent unconcern. Annabel was not visible. Mr. Vancouver, sitting near Rawley, had a suspiciously waiting air.

The young man did not rise with the others and prepare to go, but merely stared at me. I went near and said in a low voice:

"These men will resent your refusal."

"Are you threatening me?" he said under his breath.

"Give my remark whatever construction you please," I answered.

He could not hide his anger and fear, for a glance showed him a disquieting expression in the faces of the forty men waiting. Mr. Vancouver looked surprised and irritated as he studied them. The men in whom rebellion was stirring were such as he had always directed and commanded,— artisans, mechanics, clerks, sturdy and spirited every one, and loving fair play.

"Save yourself further trouble," Rawley drawled in an effort to be nonchalant. "I'll go — if I feel like it, and when I'm ready."

Although the men could not hear him, they understood, and a murmur arose. One of them angrily said:

"He's too good to work."

Then came the outbreak.

"Put him under arrest! Duck him in the river! The snob!"

Annabel suddenly appeared. The men at once desisted, and she understood the situation at a glance. Her astonishment grew as her look of angry reproach at Rawley passed to her father and found him silent and pale, as though for the first time he had seen the spirit of the common American.

She came to me and said: "Don't make trouble now. Be patient. You can find a way."

I turned to the men.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I must remind you that you have not been empowered by the colony to enforce its discipline. In this instance it is my task alone, and I propose to handle it as I think best, without your assistance, unless I call on you for it. Your attitude and remarks just now were rebellious, and, if allowed by those in authority, would disrupt us and place us at the mercy of savages. Leave this matter to me, and depend on me to see it properly adjusted. Mr. Vancouver needs Mr. Rawley today. Now to our work."

My speech affected the men in two quite different ways. Some, with a submissive glance at Mr. Vancouver who was watching me curiously, were instantly satisfied; others looked a little confused and rebellious, and were not cheerful in their obedience. They appeared a trifle uneasy, as though something might be afoot and they had not been informed. All of this sharpened my alertness.

After the day's work I had doubts as to whether I should report the incident to Captain Mason, who had not been present. I felt that something of an underground nature was at work, and that Mr. Vancouver was its focus. I could make allowance for a man shattered by adversity, but I supposed that Mr. Vancouver might have gathered himself up during the weeks we had been held as prisoners.

It turned out that he had. When Christopher came to give me my drill in the forest near the camp that day he brought disturbing information. Mr. Vancouver and Rawley, in order to be alone, had gone into the forest after I left for the fields, and talked. All that Christopher could learn was that Mr. Vancouver was carrying on secret negotiations with the king, and that a messenger from the palace was expected at a certain place within the forest in an hour.

My lesson was short that day. I sent Christopher to Captain Mason to report what he had heard, and to say that I would take the place of the native in the interview, if possible, trusting to the completeness of my disguise as a Senatra. Christopher was to be near for an emergency.

Skirting the spot where Mr. Vancouver was to meet the native, I intercepted him. It sickened me to see the sly confidence with which he approached. Meanwhile, I was aware of the great danger of discovery by the genuine messenger, for I knew the trailing skill of the natives, even though I led Mr. Vancouver as far from the meeting-place as necessary. But Christopher, who had acquired the native slyness, would know how to handle any embarrassing situation.

The discovery of Mr. Vancouver's seeming treachery

had so disturbed me that I had some doubt of myself in the interview. The simple solution offered by strangling the man in the forest kept hammering at me with a dangerous persistency. We had taken it for granted that his interest in the colony was strong; no watch had been set on his liberty, which he had used in plotting.

I was measurably collected by the time we had seated ourselves on the ground. Being totally in the dark as to what had gone before, I was forced to extreme caution, and in addition was some danger of my betraying myself or of his discovering that I was not a native.

"Why didn't the other man come?" he demanded in his old peremptory manner.

In confusion, not knowing what degree of proficiency in English to assume, I gave some answer in a lame speech, the inconsistency of which he might have detected had he been less absorbed.

"What is the king's plan?" he asked.

"He wants to know yours first," I answered.

I was prepared for his quick, half-suspicious look. "He knows what I want," was the sharp return.

"The other native didn't know. He couldn't tell the king very well."

"This is my plan," went on Mr. Vancouver: "I make some good, strong men think that Captain Mason does nothing, but sits down and waits for us all to be killed. This is secret. A fellow named Hobart is my leader. The young men are ready to go with him out of the valley. The king will tell the guard to seize them and take them to the palace. That will get rid of the best fighters in the colony."

"What will the young men think they go for?" I inquired.

"What difference does that make," he testily demanded, "so long as they are out of the way?"

"The king must know." I was solid and firm.

"I'll make them think they can pass the guard; then they'll find a way for the colony to escape, and will come back and tell me."

"But they are not to come back."

Mr. Vancouver was silent, and his impatience grew.

"You will send them into a trap?" I persisted.

Again his suspicious scrutiny. "Does the king want them to come back?" he asked.

"I don't know. But he wants your plan."

"If they don't come back," Mr. Vancouver explained, "Captain Mason will be blamed for not knowing they were to go. Then his power will be gone. The colony will break up."

The ghastly perfection of the scheme overcame me for a moment, but I must learn what benefits Mr. Vancouver expected from this wholesale sacrifice.

"What do you want of the king?"

"I and my daughter and a young man named Rawley are to be taken care of, and——"

"You mean not killed?"

He writhed and reddened under the question, and under my sullen insistence.

Instead of answering, he hurried on: "I will show the king how to work the gold, silver, copper, diamond, and other mines, and how to make much money out of them. I will make treaties with other countries, and build forts, and make him a strong army. All this has to be done sooner or later, or the island will be taken."

"What is to be done with the other white people?" I demanded.

"The king knows."

"If I can't tell him he'll send me back."

After a struggle with his anger, Mr. Vancouver said, "The king knows what he has done with other castaways."

"What do you think he has done with them?"

He started at me in a struggle with his patience, and said nothing.

"Do you think they were sent away?" I returned.

His fury broke. "No!" he exclaimed, and then suddenly checked himself.

"Then you think they are here yet?" I drove in.

He rose in a passion. "Tell the king to send me a man who isn't a fool!" he stormed.

"I will tell him," I quietly said, rising and starting away; but he halted me.

"Why do you ask those questions?" he said more composedly.

"The king told me to. He wants to know if he can trust you. If you want these people sent away,——"

"I don't! That would ruin everything. They'd send armies and war-ships, and——"

"Then, kept here—alive?"

"Certainly not! They'd kill me."

I had known this to be the answer that I would wring from him; still the renewed impulse to strangle him was almost overpowering.

"I will tell the king," I duly said, and was turning away, when another idea came. "Maybe he will first send for a man from your people. Which one do you want to go before the young men?"

"Tudor, Captain Mason's assistant," he answered with a vicious promptness. "Then, as soon as the young men are gone, I and my daughter and Rawley will go, and I will talk and plan with the king while the soldiers do their work here."

The humor that I found in the turn, personal to me, which the situation had taken, lightened my spirit, and I thought of something else.

"Did the king send you any word about Lentala, his fan-bearer?"

"I talked with the man about her. I knew there was some mystery about her and that she was close to the king. I asked that she be sent to make the plans with me."

His halt whetted my anxiety. "What did he say?"

"That she must know nothing about it, or she would break the plot."

My heart choked me with its bounding. I had gained more than I had lost, but my heart was sore for Annabel.

"I must go," I said. "Next time I come I will go to your hut in the night. Don't come into these woods again. The soldiers——"

He understood, and looked relieved. After he had disappeared I sat down in a daze, trying to reason out the tangle. Rawley was in the plot, but Annabel was innocent.

A sound made me raise my head, and I saw Christopher and Captain Mason standing before me. Christopher's face wore its customary vacancy, but Captain Mason's had a startled look, as though he had beheld what is not good for a man to see. It appeared to have shriveled him.

"Before Christopher summoned me," he dully said without any preliminary, "he found the native and sent him away. We have heard every word that passed between you and Mr. Vancouver."

Chapter VI. *Witcheries in a Woman's Hand.* A Dangerous Mood. Annabel's Tangled Situation. Heroism in Humble Duties. The Miracle Worked by Gentleness. Traitors Are Threatened.

NOT A word was spoken after I had dressed and we were returning to camp, but Captain Mason's walk lacked its usual firmness. What would he do? There is no accounting for the rashness of a man made suddenly desperate, and I remembered the temptation to strangle that had assailed me. Clearly, for the present, Christopher and I must not leave him alone for a moment. My imagination constructed this scene: Captain Mason, assembling the colony, telling them briefly that a man among them had been caught in the act of plotting to destroy us, turning upon Mr. Vancouver and pointing him out as the criminal, ordering me to tell off a squad and hang the knave in the presence of the crowd; and Annabel—— Could Christopher and I stay the flood now while the dam was straining? I feared not; a finer hand was needed.

We went to our hut. Captain Mason seated himself on a stool. Christopher gave him some water, which was eagerly drunk. With a significant look at Christopher, I left the hut.

There was a good excuse for bringing Annabel now; I had promised Beelo that he should see her. It was necessary to secure Captain Mason's assent, and I had no doubt that he would agree with me that a friend-

ship between her and Lentala might go farther toward solving our problems than all our masculine wit and fighting ability.

I reflected on the extraordinary complications in which Annabel would be involved, and the softening pressure which she would assist in bringing upon Captain Mason. There was no immediate danger from Mr. Vancouver. He lay snugly in the hollow of my hand.

Annabel was busy about the camp.

"Where is Christopher?" she cheerily asked. "It is time for him to make the fire for supper."

"Captain Mason has him," I answered. "Won't you come with me and call on our president?"

"I?" in surprise.

"Yes."

A flush mottled her cheeks, but she hesitated only a moment.

"Father won't care, I know," she said, and started with me.

She was bareheaded, and the witcheries of the twilight drifted over her. In the distance sang the deep monotone of the waterfall. Drowsy twitterings announced that the busy little people of the trees were content after their day's work. From the edges of the stream rose comfortable whispers between the water and the reeds. The lightly moving air swung odorous censers in the trees, and every flower poured out as perfume the sunshine which had filled its chalice. It was good to be thus again side by side with Annabel.

I explained tomorrow's plan for her meeting with Beelo, and impressed upon her the importance of keeping it secret. She showed the glee of a quiet

child in her acquiescence, but she must have wondered why her father was not to know.

"An adventure!" she exclaimed. "And mystery! It is delightful. Do you men with so much freedom know how depressing it is to be cooped up in this camp?"

I had not thought of it, and was surprised. Annabel had always been cheerful, and I had not observed the other women.

"Isn't it life," I asked, "for men to work and women to wait, for men to dare and women to endure?"

"Yes," she answered, looking up at me with a smile, "but isn't it a remnant of savagery?"

"Perhaps," I returned. "Yet Lentala, the savage, appears in her independence to have solved some latter-day feminine problems. I hope you will meet her soon. Then you and she can formulate a code for your sex. We are going to see Captain Mason in order to secure his consent to your meeting her brother. So you must exercise your subtlest graces on our president."

"I—I'm afraid of him," she declared in some trepidation.

"Why?"

"Because he is stern and silent and cold and——"

"That is all on the surface. His sea-training has given it to him. Underneath he has a woman's gentleness and kindness. Trust him. Look for the best in him and ignore the rest. Just now he is worried and needs all the sunshine that you know so well how to give."

She smiled her thanks, but there was concern in her question:

"Worried! Has anything special happened?"

"Was anything special needed? His responsibilities are great."

Annabel was silent,—not daring, I know, to ask more questions. She had unfolded to my comprehension what the women of our party had been suffering patiently and silently during the dreary weeks that they had been held in prison. Annabel must have borne more than any other; yet she had held up her heart and her head. Dread must have sat on her pillow through many a long hour of the night, but her soul walked forth with the sunrise.

Christopher was sitting on a bench outside the hut.

"Christopher!" she cried, "the fire isn't made yet;" but there was no chiding in her rosy smile.

"No, ma'am," he answered, rising, but standing still.

"Go and make it now, please," she said.

"All well, Christopher?" I asked, low.

His slow nod held a doubt. There was always in Christopher's manner a suggestion that speech was largely a silly indulgence, and that animals other than human beings made themselves intelligible without it.

He fetched a delicious drink which he had made from wild fruit, and served Annabel with quite an air. Her voice carried music in its thanks.

Annabel bubbled with raillery and chatter. Presently my anxious ear heard a stir within. I knew that the man nursing his hurt in the dusk was aware of the invasion, and that he understood and resented my ruse in bringing Annabel to disarm him.

"Christopher," she said, handing him the calabash from which she had drunk, "please go and make the fire and start the supper. After that, find father; ask him to come here for me."

Christopher mutely interrogated me, and I nodded. He shambled away.

"Come out and join us, Captain Mason!" I called.

It left him no choice. The darkness kindly falling veiled the grayness of his face. A touch of decrepitude lay on him as he stepped without and greeted Annabel with a stiff and stately courtesy, for he was shy with women of the higher world. The unsteadiness in his manner surprised Annabel, whose sympathies were keen and quick. I had prepared her, and, shocked though she evidently was, she met the situation bravely.

After some general talk, which was directed by me to show Annabel's suffering, her courage and helpfulness, I saw that Captain Mason was softened. I then placed before him the plan concerning Annabel and Beelo. It took the breath out of his body, and he peered at me in amazement through the gloom. The perfect assurance with which I asked for his concurrence, a hint that her discretion might be trusted, and a casual remark that Christopher approved the idea, had effect. Annabel impulsively rose, seized both his hands, and pleaded:

"Please let me go, Captain Mason. Who knows what good may not come of it?"

I don't think she noticed the catch in his throat. It was the final breaking up of the ice.

"Yes, you may go. But you'll do nothing except as Mr. Tudor approves?"

"Nothing whatever, Captain Mason. Thank you."

She released his hands and turned a beaming face to me. Pity for her welled within me. That she and her father, between whom there was so strong an attachment, should thus secretly proceed in opposite

directions, each deceiving the other, was a terrible thing. No human perception could foresee the outcome, and it gave me an uneasiness that she must have dimly seen.

"You don't look glad!" she said in astonishment.

"I am too happy for mere gladness, my friend," I replied; "and may all the good angels help you—and shield you!"

She heard the note of solemnity, and turned to Captain Mason.

"Is our situation so serious?" she asked him, a slight quaver in her voice.

"Life can have no serious dangers for so brave a heart as yours," he answered.

Mr. Vancouver came up. I could feel a tigerish stealth in him. All danger from an immediate clash between him and Captain Mason had been banished by Annabel, but I knew that the future held dangers. I was glad that she and I had become partners in the secrets and exactions of defense. With such an ally as Christopher, and such a director as Captain Mason, we would give an account of ourselves.

The captain hardened when Mr. Vancouver came. That gentleman playfully scolded Annabel for running away, and was somewhat too affable toward the silent, unresponsive sailor. Soon he tucked Annabel's hand under his arm and was leaving.

"Just a word, Mr. Vancouver," said Captain Mason in a tone that stopped my breathing.

"Well?"

"I unintentionally witnessed a scene this morning that I didn't like. I wish you to hear the order that I'll give Mr. Tudor." His voice was ominously quiet.

"Mr. Tudor," he resumed, "order Rawley to fall in with the field squad tomorrow. If he shows the slightest hesitation, clap him in irons and send for me. There's a rope for the neck of any man who undermines the discipline of this colony."

Annabel started, and reeled where she stood. Her father's nostrils were spreading with a sneering smile; but, seeing her state, he seized her arm, steadied her with a word, and in silence led her away.

Chapter VII. *Secrets For Two.* The Strange Meeting of Annabel and Beelo. Captain Mason's Cruel Decision. I Tell a Romantic Story and Make a Guess at Lentala's Origin.

Captain Mason and I had a serious talk in our hut that night.

"Don't think for a moment," he said, "that my intentions with regard to Vancouver have been upset by a woman's pretty face."

"But she is very lovely," I interposed, anxious to turn his thoughts from whatever purpose he might have.

"That is as one thinks." I could not restrain a smile at his ungraciousness, particularly as I saw that Annabel's effect on him had impaired his frankness. "For that matter," he went on, "her father is blindly planning her destruction." In answer to my look he explained: "How can a man let his avarice and cowardice make such a fool of him! Can't he see that the king is using him as a tool to disrupt and destroy the camp, including him and his party?"

I knew, as well as I knew my own thoughts, that a terrible apprehension of a fate worse than death for us all rested on him, as on me; but we had dared not give it tongue. Both had seen the naïve inconsistency between the king's desire that the island should not be discovered and his promise to send us away one at a time, and so had Mr. Vancouver. No foreigner straying to the island had ever left it, and none except our

colony was alive on it today. But in what dreadful manner had they been disposed of? And why had we been spared so long? We had been prisoners nearly two months.

Whether these fears and speculations haunted others of the colony we were both careful not to inquire, and were prompt in suppressing every uncomfortable hint. Captain Mason and I understood that the perfect cohesion of our colony, taken with our considerable numbers, offered the sole hope for our safety; and Mr. Vancouver was secretly planning to destroy our one means of defense.

We had been sitting in silence after Captain Mason's last speech. He broke it by saying:

"The situation is complex. Your interruption of Vancouver's plot and Christopher's dismissal of the native require us to lay a counter train. The king will infer from what Christopher told the native that Mr. Vancouver has abandoned his scheme to betray the colony, and that we are determined to hang together, and fight it out to the end. I imagine that the natives are growing impatient for a victim. What do you suggest, Mr. Tudor?"

"I suppose I should continue in the rôle of the king's emissary and inform Mr. Vancouver that the sending out of the young men is postponed. Fortunately we have stopped that."

"We have done nothing of the sort," declared the president. "They shall go out."

Astonishment silenced me.

"They shall go out," he drove into me again.

"To their destruction—and ours?" I asked.

"No. But they must go and take their punishment.

Then they will hear from me. You can manage it through the native boy and his sister. Let her see that they are soundly whipped and sent back to the colony. She's our friend."

"That is unthinkable," I protested. "The risk is too great. Lentala can't——"

"Don't underestimate her. You have your instructions, sir." He rose. "I'll be on hand tomorrow when you call out the men for the fields."

I had risen, and stood facing a commander instead of an ally. After a moment's struggle with desperately rebellious emotions, I saw my own absurdity, and abruptly left without a word, to fight for patience and wisdom under the stars.

* * * * * * * * *

The smiling ease with which Rawley stepped forth when I called his name with the others next morning might have disarmed me had I not caught a look of understanding between him and Mr. Vancouver, and known what it meant. My dread had been on Annabel's account, but she did not appear.

Rawley worked faithfully in the fields that day, but I saw the furtive way in which he talked now and then with certain of the men, and I noted all whom he thus favored. None of them had a guilty manner, though a concealing one. It was evidence of Mr. Vancouver's shrewdness in plotting.

* * * * * * * * *

Annabel met Christopher outside the camp that afternoon and came with him to Beelo and me. The boy betrayed a singular uneasiness as they approached, and, drawing his hat down, stood in awkward embarrassment. It puzzled me, for he had been anxious to

see her. In a glow of excitement, Annabel was conspicuously handsome, and though dressed in the rougher of the two suits which she had saved from the wreck, showed in every line the thoroughbred that she was. Seeing the lad's confusion, she spared him by giving him hardly more than a smiling glance with her warm hand-clasp, and breezily said to me as she held out an exquisite orchid:

"See what I found on the way. Isn't it beautiful!"

I took it and was fumbling to put it in the buttonhole of my lapel, when she stepped up and with frank comradeship adjusted it, remarking as she did so:

"He's very much like his sister, but smaller, and not so pretty and graceful." She did not realize that he understood English.

"I thank you — for Lentala," he constrainedly said, staring at her as his eyes began to burn.

"Oh!" cried Annabel in amused surprise. "But you are quite too good-looking for a boy, Beelo!"

He did not smile, but studied her with a disconcerting seriousness, and looked from her to me, as though watching for something which I guessed to be a sly understanding between Annabel and me that might mean ridicule of him. I saw that Annabel had innocently blundered into a wrong start. Evidently the pleasure that the lad had expected from the meeting had gone astray.

As though the words were wrenched from him by the striking picture that Annabel made, he said in a stolid, colorless voice:

"You are more beautiful than Lentala."

"Hear his disloyalty to his sister!" laughingly exclaimed Annabel, but I could see that the boy's bearing

was trying her composure. "Come!" she added; "let's be friends, for Lentala and I are, and I want you to tell me about her." She coaxingly held out her hand as to an ill-tempered child.

But he ignored it, and lowered his head till his hat-rim concealed his eyes. Annabel looked at me in questioning surprise, but before I could say anything,— being as much astonished as she,— Beelo, without raising his head, asked half sullenly, half commandingly:

"Have you and — Choseph known each other a long time?"

"A year or so," Annabel promptly answered, anxious to show her friendliness. "He's been very kind. I became a skilful horsewoman under his teaching, and we've danced together and taken long walks in the country. He knows a great many interesting things. You see, he was educated at West Point, where young men are trained to be officers of our army, and has fought in the war, and ——"

Beelo broke in with a toss of the head and a laugh that sounded much like a sneer.

Annabel opened her eyes and looked in wonder from the boy to me. She was not laughing now; alarm was creeping into her face. I could think of nothing to say, but was confident that the two fine souls would find a way.

Without raising his face to Annabel, Beelo slowly looked round at me, and regarded me deeply and in silence. Sadness stole into his eyes, and with it reproach. The mystery of it touched me as I steadily returned his look.

As he did not speak, I did. "Beelo," I kindly said,

"I don't understand you, and I don't like your conduct. You wished to see Annabel. To please me, she kindly took the trouble to come and tried to be friendly to you. But you treat her rudely. You are not worthy to touch her hand."

He blazed and went rigid. For a moment he was choked with passion; then, locking his hands behind him, and throwing back his head and shoulders, he said loudly, while his nostrils quivered:

"No! I'm not worthy to touch her hand! I'm glad of it! You send fine words to Lentala, who has not a white friend in the world! Then you bring the white girl to Beelo, that Beelo may see how different they are and go back to shame Lentala. Riding! Dancing! Walking! Ah, Beelo is a little fool,—a fool no bigger that a toad! But he can be useful,—he can make Lentala a fool too! And Lentala can be useful. She can trick King Rangan. She shall be the tool of the white people who want to leave!" He paused breathless, but there was more of despair than anger in his attitude.

Annabel had gone very white. She gave me a glance of new amazement, and then went forward, seized Beelo's arm, and forcibly turned him to look into her eyes. With a start she straightened, looking at me strangely, as if a great light had broken.

"There's a misunderstanding," she calmly said to Beelo and me as she apologetically held the quivering figure. To me she added: "You and Christopher please retire. I'll call you soon."

We left, and when screened and beyond earshot I gave Christopher a look of wondering inquiry. He blinked benignly at me, as a dog at his foolish master.

"What does it mean?" I demanded.

"Mean, sir?"

"Yes."

"You are asking me, sir?"

"Of course."

He looked away, but not with a listening manner, yet the mystery appeared to demand it. I did not happen to remember that he was the most chivalrous and the least meddlesome man I had ever known.

"Well, I'll tell you, sir," he presently said in his slow, gentle way; "it will be all right."

So it apparently was when Annabel called us back, for the two were chatting amicably as they sat on the ground. Annabel's serious mistake, by which she had imperiled my plans, had been turned by her to excellent account.

Christopher was waiting to conduct her back to camp; he would return, for Beelo had informed me that there were matters which he wished to tell us alone. The parting between him and Annabel was friendly and held promise, but Beelo's face was not wholly unclouded. Holding Annabel's hand and gazing into her face, he said, with a touch of sadness:

"Anybody would love you."

Annabel blushed, and turned laughingly away.

"I'll see you again very soon!" called the boy.

Annabel turned and blew him a smiling kiss. The lad stood and gazed long at the spot where she was lost among the trees.

"You like her, Beelo?" I asked.

Much to my surprise, a little droop pulled at his mouth-corners.

"She is very lovely," he softly said.

"Is that a thing to be sad about?"

"Yes. Lentala can never be as sweet and beautiful."

"She is as sweet and beautiful as Annabel, and—and—what shall I say?—more fascinating."

His face was turned away, and he was silent. After a while he faced me, and said, while observing me closely:

"But she belongs to your kind, your world."

"My heart finds my kind, and that is my world."

He again turned away. In trying to find a reason why any of this mattered to him, or why he appeared in a measure to resent Annabel, the old suspicion that had lodged in a corner of my mind came forth. The remarkable difference between Lentala and her brother on one hand and the natives on the other must have some special explanation, and Beelo must have a secret which he had a good reason for guarding. Christopher and I had probably been the only white men to touch their lives, and there was in them that which knew and claimed its own. It was a hungry demand, and jealous. To see the desired companionship subject to an older claim, such as Annabel's, was the finding of a barrier. I determined to probe for the secret by indirect means.

"The soul that finds its kind finds its world, Beelo," I said, "and souls have neither race nor color. Would you like to hear a strange little story?"

"Yes!" he eagerly answered.

I sat down, and he seated himself facing me, keenly interested.

"A long time ago a white man—a gentleman, no doubt—was in a ship that was sailing the seas. A great storm came on. His ship was wrecked, and he

was cast up on the beach of a beautiful tropical island. It was decreed by the natives, who were jealous for their country, that he should suffer the fate of all who had drifted before him to those shores. But for some reason — that may be another story some time — he was spared, and the king gave him a wife from among the native girls. Two children were born to them, a girl and afterward a boy; but their father had so strongly impressed his racial peculiarities on them that they were in an unfortunate position,— outcasts in a way, and perhaps in danger of their lives, by reason of the deeply planted native hatred for the white blood. So the king, who had spared the man, took them under his protection, and as the queen had no children, she loved them as her own. But in time, as the children grew up, the white blood in them began to starve for its kind, and to whisper of a far country whence it had come. That is nature's way. She lets us go just so far from the plan on which she started us, and then she sends a voice that speaks deep within us. We may not know at first what it says, but——"

"Just a longing?" Beelo asked

"Merely that. We want something very much, but don't know what it is. We are dissatisfied. That comes in youth, when the tides of life flow free, and before the soul is fully awake. Afterward, when it has ripened and mellowed, it finds its kind and makes its home wherever——"

"After a while. But now!" demanded Beelo.

I ignored him with a smile, and went back to the story.

"At last the sister had grown to womanhood and the brother nearly to manhood. A much larger company

of white people than had ever before been stranded on the island came to its shores. The girl and the boy had been spoiled by the king, and they had much their own way. The girl demanded that she be taken with the king to see the castaways. It was the voice in her heart."

Beelo nodded, and then with nervous fingers began to weave a twig-house on the sand.

"Do you like the story?" I asked.

He looked up in surprise. "Is that all, Choseph?"

"Isn't that sufficient?"

He drew a deep breath. "She went there just to *see* them?" he said.

I smiled into his brilliant eyes. "I'll tell you the rest of the story some other time," I remarked, satisfied, because at not a single point had he criticized my guessing. "There is one thing more," I went on. "Of course the children adopted the native dress, but their father's blood in them had lightened their native color, and that must be overcome."

His eyes kindled brighter; his lips had fallen apart. There was not a movement in his body.

"Lad, how did you learn to stain a fair skin so well that it looks like a native's?"

With that I seized the collar of his blouse, to tear it open and see the real color of his chest before he could prevent.

Chapter VIII. *A Crumbling Edge.* Beelo's Horror at the Fate Intended for Us. My Visit in Disguise to Mr. Vancouver. Annabel's Dramatic Defiance, and How She Was Humbled.

Eelo sprang away and scampered into the forest as though Satan pursued. That gave me no uneasiness. I gathered up his twigs and began laboriously to weave the hut.

A gurgling laugh raised my head. Twenty feet away, in a direction opposite to that in which Beelo had disappeared, I saw him lying on the ground, kicking up his heels, and, his cheeks resting in his hands, mischievously laughing at me.

"You haven't gone?" I said. "Christopher will come soon, and I have something to say to you first."

He rose, came forward gingerly, and halted a safe distance away. I sometimes wondered whether any other man would have borne with him at all. The wretch knew that I had grown absurdly fond of him.

"What do you want to tell me?" he asked, as he crept nearer and contemptuously regarded my hut-building effort.

In a few words I frankly told him of my experience as a Senatra with Mr. Vancouver. He listened absorbed and aghast.

"I didn't know," he breathed. "I am glad you told me. You do trust me, don't you?"

"Trust you, Beelo? Have I ever failed?"

"No, but you are always thinking of your people, never of Lentala and Beelo."

"You have taught me to think of you and Lentala, else I never would have told you about Mr. Vancouver and his plot. But don't you see? The king is using Mr. Vancouver to break up our colony, Beelo," raising myself in aggressive earnestness. "You talk of my trusting you. I have already put my life and more than two hundred other lives in your hands. But not for one moment have you ever trusted me."

He was deep in thought, and was distressed. Before I could ask him for the cause, Christopher came up.

"Something is going to happen very soon," Beelo said. "Christopher, what did you say to the native that came to see Mr. Vancouver?"

Christopher wore his stupidest manner

Beelo reached round, picked up a stick and threatened him.

"You know what I said. Now answer—quick!"

"Me?"

"Me?" mocked Beelo, and struck him. The nearest that I had ever seen to a smile on Christopher's face came then as a twinkle in his eyes.

"I'll tell you," he answered. "I told him Mr. Vancouver didn't never want to see him no more." That was a long speech for Christopher.

"Then what happened?" impatiently demanded Beelo.

"I done this a-way at him." Christopher crossed his eyes and made a grimace at Beelo. The act was so unexpected and terrifying that Beelo started back in alarm, and then rolled on the ground in laughter.

He sat up. "What did the man do then?"

"This a-way." Christopher's face assumed a look of astonishment and fear.

"What then?"

"He runned away."

Beelo nodded thoughtfully, and said:

"The king will think Mr. Vancouver changed his mind. Very well. Now he won't wait any longer. He will make a demand for one of your people." His manner was grave.

He was surprised when I informed him of Captain Mason's determination that the young men be permitted to leave the valley, and that Lentala should arrange for their being turned back,—I had no heart to say anything about their rough handling by the natives.

"I'll tell her," he said. "I think she can manage it."

"But are you sure?" I anxiously demanded.

"Don't worry, Choseph. You are too serious to be happy. Let's talk about the first man to go out when the king sends for one. Do you wish Mr. Vancouver to go?" The question came with a keen look.

"Not if it will expose him to any danger, or give him an opportunity to plot against us."

Beelo's look became suspicious. "What do you owe him, that he is not to be exposed to danger?" he asked.

Seeing the trend of his question, I was irritated, and sternly said:

"That is my affair, and I won't discuss it. If there's to be anything petty and spiteful in the matters of life and death that we are planning, I will stop everything right here, or demand that Lentala send some one else to me if it is impossible for her to come."

Beelo was staring at me in surprise. He turned inquiringly to Christopher, and saw gentler but none the less reproving eyes. For a second he floundered between resentment and irrepressible good-nature, and then with a laugh threw a handful of sand at Christopher.

"Choseph!" he cried; "I didn't mean anything, really I didn't. And I'll be good." After reflection he asked, "Who is Mr. Vancouver's best friend?"

"A man named Rawley."

"You think he knows Mr. Vancouver's plan?"

"He certainly does."

"Then let him be the first."

Darkness crouched behind all of this, but Beelo's intelligent eyes were a light ahead. Unquestionably his mind was working rapidly, but his speech was slow and had silent intervals. He and Lentala were evidently undertaking severe tasks and desperate risks the nature of which I could not even surmise. Some profound motive must be urging them on.

"When he is taken out of the valley," Beelo said after a pause, "I'll want you and Christopher to go too, with me. Will you?"

"We'll do anything you wish, Beelo."

"As natives."

"Good."

"It will be very dangerous."

"That is nothing."

"Not a soul is to know but your captain. Not Annabel, mind you!" he abruptly added.

"Certainly not."

"And you both promise that if your lives are threatened, you will try not to hurt or kill any one except as a last resort?"

We promised.

"Now," said Beelo, "I want Christopher to go with me at once, and we'll make a raft. When we go out of the valley it will be by way of the river."

"That is all fully agreed to, dear little brother," I said firmly, "but some things must be understood. The first is that no harm shall befall any man taken out of the valley by the king's order."

"You don't trust me, Choseph," he replied, looking hurt.

"Far more than you trust me," I kindly but emphatically said. "While I know that wisdom and a noble purpose are in your and Lentala's every plan and act, I have heavy responsibilities, and I know that four heads would be better than two in this matter. I have no right to go ahead in the dark, and I demand to know what the plans are."

The pain in Beelo's face deepened, but there was no resentment.

"It isn't that I don't trust you, Choseph," he said, an appealing look in his eyes.

"What is it, then?"

He looked hunted, and blurted out:

"That's what you and Christopher are going with me for,—to keep from harm the man whom the king will send for, and——"

"What is the danger to him?" I insisted.

"I don't know! I can only imagine!" he passionately said. "It's horrible. I think you understand. And you are to lay plans with Lentala for saving the colony."

I was about to press the matter further, but a look from Christopher stopped me.

"I am sorry to have pained you, dear little brother." I took his hand. "Will you forgive me?"

"Yes," with a smile.

He rose, and his relief was shaded with anxiety. This parting was the first sad one. I also had risen, and the boy was looking up into my face.

"I am trusting you," he said, "trusting you with my life and Lentala's, and the lives of many others."

"Yes, and you'll find me worthy, dear little brother."

"I know." He withdrew his hand, took Christopher's arm and pressed it to his own side, and peered deep into his eyes. "Do you love me, old Christopher?"

"Me?"

Beelo gently slapped Christopher's cheek.

"Answer! Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Christopher," impressively, "if my life were in danger, and you could save me by giving your own life, would you?"

"Me?"

"You needn't answer if you don't want to."

"Yes, I would die for you."

In a burst of laughter Beelo drew his big head down and laid his cheek against it. "What an absurd old Christopher!" he cried. "Come."

He stepped back, and again turned to me.

"Choseph, one thing more! As the king's messenger will you again see Mr. Vancouver?"

"Yes, if you wish."

"It's better. Tell him to send the young men out whenever he pleases, and to take the passage by which you entered the valley."

"I understand."

"That is all. Good-bye." He walked away slowly with Christopher, and for the first time I noticed that he looked as though bearing a burden heavy for his strength.

* * * * * * * * *

After laying the matter before Captain Mason, I prepared my disguise and visited Mr. Vancouver that evening. He and Rawley occupied the same hut; Annabel slept in one adjoining. I had previously taken care to note that as Annabel was helping a young mother with the care of an ailing infant, she would not likely intrude on my visit.

The two men were startled when they found me standing silently before them. In the dim light of a nut-oil lamp I saw Rawley's face blanch, and I wondered how he would bear the ordeal fronting him outside the valley.

"Well?" eagerly said Mr. Vancouver.

After instructing him as to the sending out of the young men, I informed him that the king was nearly ready for a man, and added that Rawley would be acceptable. Mr. Vancouver was disappointed that he himself could not go, but cheerfully said:

"Certainly. Mr. Rawley will be glad to go."

I enjoyed the young man's dismay. Not so Mr. Vancouver.

"Why, man, it's the opportunity of a lifetime!" he declared to Rawley. "There's no danger. The king will furnish a safe-conduct—won't he?" he added, turning to me.

"I suppose so. Your friend couldn't find the way otherwise."

"Of course! Brace up, Rawley, and thank your stars for your good fortune. You'll have important things to tell me when you return." For all his cheering manner, Mr. Vancouver could not conceal his contempt. To me he said: "Give the king my thanks. Tell him that his kind offer is gratefully accepted, and that Mr. Rawley will be ready at any time."

Rawley was a bluish white.

"Very well," he faintly said; "I'll have to go, I suppose, but who knows what is really to be done with me? I don't——" With a gesture Mr. Vancouver stopped the indiscreet speech.

"Give the king my message of thanks and grateful acceptance," he snapped out in his old business-like way. "Mr. Rawley will go whenever he is summoned."

I bowed, and turned to leave, but found Annabel blocking the door. Her eyes were wide with surprise. She had never before seen natives near the camp at night, and never one alone. With unexpected firmness she refused to let me pass.

"Father, Mr. Rawley, what does this mean? Where is Mr. Rawley going?"

The men sat dumb. Annabel's instinct told her that treachery was in the air.

"Does Captain Mason know about this?" she asked.

Mr. Vancouver was the first to recover, but he underestimated his daughter's shrewdness.

"Not so loud, daughter. It is all right. Let the man pass. I'll explain."

Among Annabel's charms was a certain rashness. Here she stood between affection and duty, and it would be interesting to observe the outcome. I was glad that she continued to bar my escape.

"If it's all right," she said, "let us three go with this man to Captain Mason and——"

"We'll have no more nonsense, daughter! Are you aware what your attitude toward me means?"

"I don't know, father. I—I don't understand. You have never spoken this way to me before. Surely——"

"This foolishness must stop here," her father brusquely said, rising and advancing, with the evident intention of dragging her from the door; but something in her face stopped him. It was time for me to interfere, lest she spoil everything. The risk was in lending my voice to her sensitive ear.

"He knows," I gruffly said.

"Captain Mason?"

I nodded.

"Come with me and say that to him," she demanded.

I nodded again. The exasperation and fear in Mr. Vancouver's face did not escape his daughter.

"I won't have it!" he nearly shouted. To me, "Don't you go, or I'll——"

I stopped him with a knowing look, which he rightly understood to mean that it would be well to lay her suspicions by going, and that I might be depended on to handle the matter satisfactorily. In truth, I was enjoying the situation too much for thought of graver things. And I had never seen Annabel so superb.

"Father," she said, "you owe this to me, and I owe it to you."

Mr. Vancouver's uneasy face betrayed his predicament. Might he trust my ability to deceive Captain Mason? was his evident thought. The peril was great. I was maliciously happy over the grinding of the man.

Suppose I should make a slip with Captain Mason: that would mean the hangman's noose for Mr. Vancouver,— I knew he was thinking all that. I could not resist the temptation to harry him.

"I go," I said to Annabel.

She wavered, but her courage rose, and with reckless heroism she stepped out without looking at her father. I followed in silence. She did not glance back, and I think she was glad that the men remained in the hut. With her head held up by the high purpose within her, she walked as though she were above the stars and they were her stepping-stones. Once she stopped short. I was certain that love had conquered and that she would tell me my willingness to go satisfied her, and so would send me away; but she went desperately on.

There was a brilliant tropical moon, and the captain was sitting in the shine of it on the outer bench of his hut. He rose in surprise.

"Captain Mason," panted Annabel, "I found this native in our camp just now, and I wondered if you knew."

He had recognized me, but Annabel did not see the twinkle in his eyes. He knew that I had blundered in letting her discover me with her father. I was amazed at the fine delicacy of the man. Instead of asking her questions, he demanded an explanation of me. With great caution not to betray myself, I said that I had the king's permission to take Rawley out, that he might see something of the island, and procure some of the gems so abundant there.

The moonlight revealed the shame that burned Annabel's cheeks because she had doubted her father. Would Captain Mason have the tact to cure her hurt?

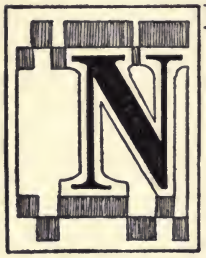
"May I take your hand?" he asked. She wonderingly yielded it. As he held it and looked down into her lovely face there came into his voice a gentleness, a tenderness, that I am certain had been hitherto strange to it. "This is a wonderful thing that you have done,—the noblest, bravest thing that I have ever seen in my life. It was so not alone because it might have meant a matter of life and death, but because it was hard to do. I am proud to know and be trusted by such a woman."

Tears were slipping down her cheeks as he released her hand.

"If you have that kindly regard for me, Captain Mason," she said, "let it extend to my father. He meant nothing wrong in violating the rule."

"He has special privileges, Miss Vancouver. I will pay no attention to the incident."

Chapter IX. *An Iron Hand Comes Down.* Anxiety Over Beelo's Absence. The Runaways Return in Disgrace. Mr. Vancouver's Predicament. Rebellion Breeding. The Arrest. Merciless Discipline.



Next morning the young men in Mr. Vancouver's plot passed secret looks and words, and Mr. Vancouver and Rawley wore an indifferent air too conspicuously.

Annabel emerged late; she and Dr. Preston had been with the suffering child that night; but she looked much more worn and depressed than the night's vigil warranted. I greeted her cheerily, and her quiet smile was ready. I saw nothing to indicate that she noted anything unusual afoot. Captain Mason gave her a pleasant bow.

The colony had early integrated into small social groups, particularly at meal-times. We sat on rough benches at two long tables under trees. There was a rearrangement of groups at breakfast this morning, so as to bring the conspirators together at an end occupied by Mr. Vancouver and Rawley. Annabel sat with the children. The maneuver of the men did not escape Captain Mason, who was some distance away and at the other table, having rigidly held himself aloof from all social preferences. After breakfast he gave me an unobtrusive look, and left. I soon followed, and found Christopher with him in our hut.

"You noticed, Mr. Tudor?"

"Yes. They will go out of the valley today. Lentala will see that they are turned back. What shall I do?"

An amused look came into his eyes. "You may abandon your usual plan of calling the names of those who shall go to the fields, and announce that only volunteers need go. That will spare such of the idiots as are on your list from sneaking out of the fields on pretense of headache. Give them a long rope. Everything is moving beautifully to a crisis. Take your men to the fields. Christopher will stay here."

With the insistence of trifles thrusting themselves into a tense situation, every small thing of the morning marched with me back to the tables. I must observe the progress of some insatiably hungry nestlings in a tree, and laugh at a round scolding from their mother. Never had I heard so many birds singing at once. The solemn cadence of the waterfall sent a Sabbath spirit through the air. The forest shadows quivered with mysteries and portents, and the air was drunk with the perfume of many flowers.

Annabel's glance showed that she had noted our leaving the tables, but a cheery word from me laid her uneasiness.

Relief appeared in some faces when I announced that only volunteers would go to the fields that day. Mr. Vancouver studied me, and Rawley was nervous. A small crowd responded to my call, and then amused shame swept over the men as I good-naturedly laughed at them, with the result that a larger squad than usual came forward. I kept Mr. Vancouver in sight, and was not surprised to catch him throwing a look at a conspirator here and there, causing the guilty to stand forth with the innocent. I knew that he suspected something in my departure from the usual way lately of calling out the men.

The work in the fields went with a smoothness that gave no hint of trouble beneath the surface. The conspirators dropped away one after another, with my pleasant assent. Rawley remained. That meant his want of courage to join the daring expedition. When the remnant started for camp I went to the spot where I expected Beelo and Christopher.

The time for Beelo's appearance came and passed. I had an irksome wait, and in spite of my confidence in his skill, I grew uneasy lest he had fallen into difficulties. Never before had he failed to keep an appointment. His endurance and pluck had been extraordinary. From his home at the palace to our meeting-places had been a number of miles, without counting his trouble and ingenuity in avoiding detection, and the hard labor of scaling the valley wall; yet he had never failed, never complained, never mentioned the heroism for which his conduct stood. I bitterly accused myself and Captain Mason for our selfishness in accepting the boy's allegiance and labors as a mere incident of our struggle to escape. My heart went out to him now; I had been remiss in appreciation. Had he been of a more aggressive nature, less gentle and timid, relying more on force than ingenuity, perhaps my conscience would have been easier. The task which it had been so easy for me to send Lentala with reference to the malcontents, must have been severe for her, and must have involved her brother.

Christopher came at last, but not Beelo. The man reported all well in camp; Annabel had been downcast until Captain Mason cheered her; Mr. Vancouver was painfully restless; none of the conspirators had returned.

We waited until all hope of Beelo's arrival was futile. Christopher had been listening, but I dreaded to question him. Finally I remarked that we must go, as we could not expect Beelo so late. The readiness with which Christopher acquiesced assured me that he had not expected the lad, but I had no heart to ask him whether he thought that trouble had been the detaining cause. We returned to camp.

Dr. Preston had much patching of cuticle to do that night, for the young men returned after dark. There had been an uneasy hush over the camp all day. Upon their arrival, which was accomplished with all possible unostentation, a buzz arose and gossip leaked. I was with Captain Mason, who sat silent and in grim content as I told him what was going on. We were both curious to see what Dr. Preston, a quiet young man of fine intelligence, would deem his duty after the urgency of his offices had passed. After a while he came, excited and a little frightened.

He reported that there were no serious hurts, and that the men would be about next day.

"What account do they give?" inquired Captain Mason. The twinkle in his eyes was lost on the earnest young physician.

"They were peaceably exploring the valley, Captain,—just a lark, you know, although it had the serious purpose of finding out anything that might be useful in the escape of the colony,—when they were set upon by an overwhelming horde of savages, the evident purpose being to take them away by force. Our men, though so greatly outnumbered, held their ground, but the scrimmage was close and savage. They would have won without the fan-bearer's interference, but

her coming up with a personal guard put an end to the affair, as she called the natives off."

Captain Mason's amused attention sharpened to a keen interest. "The king's fan-bearer?" he echoed.

"Yes; the one we saw at the feast."

The president nodded. "They have all told you the same story, I suppose," he remarked.

"Yes."

"Thank you. That is all."

In leaving, Dr. Preston looked surprised that Captain Mason should appear so indifferent.

Captain Mason announced no plans concerning the young men that night, and there was nothing unusual in his bearing next morning when the colony assembled for breakfast. All watched him narrowly. When breakfast was over, and before we had risen from the tables, he sent Christopher for me, for I sat some distance away. As I rose, I had a strong feeling that something extraordinary was about to fall to my hand, for I knew Captain Mason's nature and his trust in me.

That brought Beelo vividly to mind. He had seen hardly more than the gentler side of me. Indeed, it had doubtless been his own gentleness, his innate delicacy and refinement, that had held in subjection the ruder elements in me, so deep was my fondness for him. And it had never been irksome, though the conduct which it had almost forced upon me was strikingly different from that which usually governed me. While I was glad that Beelo was not present to see what I knew was coming, still his spirit was with me, and so strongly that it was tangible. My whole outlook was filled with him, and I could not shake off the feeling that he was really near and observing.

Under the impulse, I sent a trained glance into the shadows about the camp, and suddenly stopped, for I found his bright eyes peering at me from the trees. A closer look discovered that underneath the almost conscious mischief that sparkled in his eyes was apprehension. I had a moment of anger that he should be there, and tried to give him a look that would send him away; but he made a face at me, and with deep misgivings I went to my duty, striving to put him out of my mind.

"Call for order," Captain Mason directed, "and make a complete statement of the affair, omitting Mr. Vancouver's connection with it. Then tell off twelve steady men for a guard, and have them arrest all of the young men who disobeyed the rule. Manage the details in your own way. I'll take command after the arrest."

Obedience to authority was a law of my training, but I was aghast, and wondered if the man realized that he might be touching a match to a magazine.

As Mr. Vancouver was the danger-center, I glanced at him. He had been closely observing the president. I shall not forget the picture that he made as I called for order and proceeded with the speech. By no effort could he control the emotions that surged to his face,—his consternation at the appalling correctness of my account, his ferocious resentment and anger, his sense of being baffled and humiliated while being spared from open shame, his white fear that at last he would be exposed as the arch-traitor.

I observed Annabel also, and saw her puzzled uneasiness as I reminded the colony of the king's injunction and the great danger of disregarding it; her furtive

glances at her father; her amazement when I hinted at the plot for undermining Captain Mason's authority, and spoke of its secret working toward the destruction of the colony; the blanching of her cheeks when I described the effort of the young men to slip out of the valley, their being beaten and bound, and the mercy that had spared them, whipped and wounded, to sneak back in darkness to camp; and the lie they told to cover their treachery and shame.

There was a tense pause when I had done, and then I called out the names of the guilty. So overwhelming had been the presentation, that, as Captain Mason must have foreseen, there was no time for immediate reaction toward mutiny. I called out the guard. A death-like stillness followed. Captain Mason was standing with the silence and firmness of stone. I stole a glance at Beelo and saw that he had slipped round through the trees to be nearer.

I rapped out an order for the guard to step forward. They looked round curiously at one another, some with a half-smile as they glanced at Captain Mason, to see if he approved. His face was expressionless. I repeated the order, more peremptorily, and in slowly rising they regarded me curiously and in some wonder, as they had never seen me with such a bearing. Whatever they saw and heard quickened their action. There was an impressive solemnity in the proceeding, and it strengthened them moment by moment. I did not hurry them, since it was clear that a sense of serious responsibility was rising in them.

"Lenardo, step forward and submit to arrest," I sharply said to one of the recalcitrants, a decent young carpenter.

He paled, then flushed, and blunderingly turned to Mr. Vancouver. But that gentleman was gazing at me with all the hate of his soul. Annabel shrank under the significance of Lenardo's silent appeal to her father. Receiving no guidance from Mr. Vancouver, the young culprit sent a fluttering, desperate look abroad, picking out his guilty associates. All the comfort he got from them was a frightened glance in return.

The impaled man wriggled awkwardly to his feet,—for I was giving him time,—and with a grin and shrug made a pitiful attempt to treat the arrest as a pleasantry.

"Stand facing that end of the guard-line," I ordered, pointing.

"Come, Henry," he said to one of the conspirators. The bravado was clearly sham.

"No talking!" I ripped out.

It jerked Lenardo straight, and he came forward and stood where I had directed.

The young man addressed as Henry slouched up with a faint trace of Lenardo's swagger, but my sharp "Step lively!" electrified him into firmer action, and his grin went sour.

"Hobart!" I next called. I selected him for the third, for I knew his independent, rebellious nature, his courage and pride, and wished the severest test of the discipline to come at once.

Because we had been good friends and he knew that I respected him, he stared incredulously, but found me a stranger. Then a vicious look flared in his face, and, still sitting, he fingered the handle of a heavy iron vessel on the table while regarding me defiantly.

I waited, and then called him again.

"I won't be made a fool of in this way!" he cried,

rising, his face blazing, his hold on the iron vessel tightening.

"You two guards on the left, do your duty!" I commanded.

They hesitatingly advanced upon him. Making a great scattering of frightened women and children, Hobart stepped back, brandished the vessel, and shouted:

"I'm a free American citizen, I am! I'm a law-abiding man and I know my rights! Stand back, there," to the guards, "or I'll——"

"Two more guards from the left. Step lively!" I called.

The advance of the four guards was checked by a diversion. Mr. Vancouver, who had been sitting in apathetic silence, suddenly spoke out with biting clearness:

"Hobart, it is the duty of every one here to submit to authority."

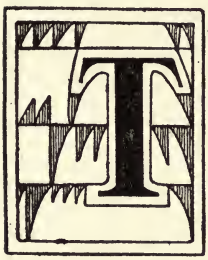
The young man opened his mouth in astonishment, and instantly drooped; the vessel clattered from his hand to the ground.

"I won't make trouble now," he grumbled, "but we've been played low down by somebody, and I'll——"

"Silence!" I said.

With a threatening shoulder-lift at Mr. Vancouver, which deepened that gentleman's pallor, Hobart sullenly fell in. I quickly called out the other culprits; all obeyed and stood in line facing the guard. Then I looked round at Captain Mason for orders.

Chapter X. *The Finding of a Man.* Shame and Horror Follow Disobedience. A Violent Outbreak and Its Result. The Heads That Struck a Wall. A Frightened Face Among the Trees.



The president said nothing, but gave a signal to Christopher, who brought up a basket containing rope-ends and strips of cloth, of native manufacture. I understood what I was next to do, and under ordinary circumstances should have thought of nothing but the doing; but now a coldness seized my heart, for I thought of Beelo, as a horrified witness.

There was a craning to see what the basket held, and then came a quick drawing of the breath and afterward a hiss as the truth dawned on those of quick perception.

Picking up a rope-end, I stood facing the crowd in silence until perfect stillness had come. Then I went to Lenardo, the first in line, and said to the guard:

"Are any of you experienced in tying a man's hands?"

A head-shake was the response of each.

"Then observe how this is done," I said. And to Lenardo, "Turn your back and cross your wrists behind you."

All the blood fled his face. He glanced about with a shamed, beseeching helplessness, his eyes wide with horror and his look an appeal for protection from the outrage.

"Turn, and cross your wrists," came my command as evenly as before.

The prisoner obeyed, his hands trembling.

"Cross your wrists." My tone was such as a farrier might use to a horse he was shoeing.

Lenardo crossed them.

"Observe," I repeated to the guards, as I quickly wound the cord and knotted it.

Hobart watched the proceeding narrowly, his face growing more livid, his eyes bulging farther, his breathing uneven. Once he sent a flaming glance at Mr. Vancouver, who winced under it, and sat with a sickly, shrunken look. I knew that the supreme test of discipline lay ahead, and I was warming to the situation.

"Tie the next one," I said to two of the guards, handing them a strip. At the same time, no longer able to resist a glance at Beelo, I found in his stricken face so strange a look that it disconcerted me for a moment. It looked to be both horror and appeal. But my duty was plain.

I stood by and observed the clumsy work of the two guards in tying the second man, who, meeker than Lenardo,—although both were manly fellows,—submitted more promptly.

Hobart's turn came next. He was looking about as a trapped beast, and he swayed and muttered. It was clear that under the approaching degradation he was letting his wits tangle.

Some women, sickened by the scene, and fearing a tragedy from Hobart, slipped away, a few softly crying, others very white. They hid in a huddle behind the storehouse, the mothers taking their children.

"One more turn. Tighter. Work faster," I ordered the guards tying the second man.

They obeyed with nervous eagerness.

Then came Hobart's turn. I stood before him. He knew what to do without my order, and I was silent.

"Haven't we any friends among you people?" he bellowed, stepping back and hardening every muscle. "Are you all cowards, to let these brutes ride rough-shod over you?"

"Submit, Hobart," cut Mr. Vancouver's voice.

I turned upon him, but said nothing, and his cadaverous face whitened still more under my stare.

"We need no assistance from you, sir," Captain Mason coldly said.

He started; a momentary flash enlivened his sunken eyes.

"Step up here in line," I said to Hobart.

He wavered toward submission under Mr. Vancouver's order, but my prompt suppression of that intervention thrust upon him an angry despair. "To hell with you!" he shouted to me. "You bully! You cur! Here, fellows," addressing his comrades in line, "don't be whipped dogs! We are free American citizens, we are! Break away!" He stepped still farther back and edged toward the table. "Stand by me! Be men! We'll settle this thing! Come on!"

The line swayed.

"Guard, re-form the prisoners in line," I ordered.

They stepped forward.

"Fight, boys! Arm yourselves at the tables!" Hobart's fierce words thrilled the camp.

"Lively there!" I snapped to the guards. "Seize Hobart first."

"The tables, boys!" shouted Hobart. "Romer," he added to a husky young man of the party, "tackle Captain Mason. I'll attend to Tudor!"

Hobart sprang at Romer, gave him a shake, and shouted, "Get to work!" and then advanced toward me as Romer was hardening for assault.

As Hobart had rudely calculated, the moment was snatched by the other prisoners for a rush on the guard and the tables, and they broke on the bound as Hobart hurled himself upon me. But he was too precipitate, and lacked training.

It is doubtful that any in the camp except myself saw how the next thing happened. There was a muffled crack, and Hobart's feet cleared the ground, his limbs whipped the air as though he were drowning, and he sprawled on the earth in a disorganized, quivering heap. A glance showed me that Romer had been stopped two yards from Captain Mason by a look such as he had never encountered before, and he stood staring like an imbecile.

A low cry broke from fifty feminine throats when Hobart's body made its impact with the ground. But the entire rush had been paralyzed; it was clearly the impression that Hobart had been killed, and all were staring from him to me. The guard had responded; the prisoners were in subjugation, some by a collar-grip of the guard, others panting on the ground under urgent knees, still others standing inert.

"Hands off the prisoners. Re-form the line," I ordered.

When this had been done, the young men sullen, sheepish, and silent, and viewing with awe the still body of Hobart on the ground, I looked round upon

the circle till I found the man I wanted. My glance had included Captain Mason and found him stolid and motionless as he observed my procedure.

"Dr. Preston, come forward," I said.

He instantly responded.

"Please examine Hobart's jaw and neck," I directed. "One or the other may be broken."

As he was turning away to obey he discovered a red trickle from my right hand.

"Are you hurt?" he inquired.

"No."

He carefully examined the heap on the ground.

"Only a contusion and a slight brain-concussion," he announced.

"You two," I promptly said to two of the guards, "buck and gag Hobart. Do you know how?"

They shook their heads, but under my direction accomplished what appeared to be a disagreeable task. The process consisted in tying Hobart's hands and feet, flexing his knees, slipping his arms over them, and thrusting a stick under his knees and over his arms, thus reducing him to a helpless knot. Then they thrust a towel between his teeth and tied it at the back of his head.

"Shall I do anything to revive him, sir?" asked the doctor. It was interesting to hear the "sir" slip from his tongue.

I looked to Captain Mason for directions, but his face remained void.

"No," I said. Then to two of the guards, "Take him to the shade over there, on the ground," indicating a tree near by and in full view of the camp.

Meanwhile, the tying of the other prisoners had

gone on rapidly and smoothly. When it was finished, I ordered the men taken to the shade and lined up behind Hobart, who lay on his side, the guards standing by. The prisoners were a very sober-looking crowd.

Then came a lull. I had regarded the subjugation of the men as merely the lighter preparatory work for some grave procedure which Captain Mason would direct after that was accomplished. At first I was doubtful of my wisdom in withholding restorative measures from Hobart, but I had done so hoping that it would have the effect both of softening Captain Mason and of impressing the other prisoners and the camp at large. Now I had to face unknown plans, but Captain Mason still remained mute. It was evident that, since quiet had come, it was from him rather than me that the camp awaited the next move; it was his crushing mastery that all felt; it was his iron hand that lay on every heart. He quietly seated himself, and without a glance at me waited, his face wearing the undisturbed calm that distinguished it always in dramatic situations.

The women in hiding peered out cautiously, and then joined those on the scene. A slight stir, accompanied with murmurs, rose in a spot where the women stood thickest, and a shrill voice came angrily.

"Yes, I will! You can't stop me! I say it's an outrage, and I'm going to untie that boy and take that strangling thing out of his mouth." She was advancing, a middle-aged woman, with a determined air, and she walked straight toward Hobart, ignoring me as I stood near him. "I just want to say to you, Mr. Tudor, that it was enough to knock the senses out of him, and that it's inhuman and brutal to keep him tied up like

an animal. If the *men* in this camp can be bullied and scared, I'll let you know that there's a *woman* who can't. I'm going to untie that lad, and ——"

I had stepped forward and laid a kindly hand on her arm as she spoke, but she threw it off.

"Let me alone!" she cried. "If you want to strike a woman dead, you murdering bully, do it! I dare you!"

Nodding to two of the guards, I said: "Take her to her hut, and keep her there. If she makes the least noise, bind and gag her."

"You brute! You coward!" she cried, making a dash forward.

The guards gingerly seized her, and she talked and struggled wildly. But they dragged her away, and no sound came from the hut. Captain Mason gave not the slightest attention to the incident, which greatly deepened the depression on the camp.

Hobart's slow, heavy breathing became regular, then fluttered; his eyes opened, and rolled unseeing. Intelligence began to dawn in his face, and with it came an unconscious straining at his bonds. That hastened his recovery. A wild, clear look that roved a moment and settled malignantly on me, showed that he had come to himself. His astonished glance at his helpless state preceded an effort for speech that his gag turned to a growl, and he made a mighty tug to snap the cords. That failing, he twisted his head to see the line of prisoners standing bound. Then his gaze found Captain Mason, who was not observing him, and he savagely growled and champed his gag.

I looked furtively round for Beelo, and found him staring at me as at something strange and monstrous. It

was more than I could bear, and on looking away I discovered the gathering of clouds, and then heard low thunder in the distance.

Hobart's fury wore itself out. Humiliation took its turn. Toward the end came a humbled spirit and dumb pleading. A quickening ran through the crowd, and eager, appealing eyes were upon me from every direction; but I waited. From humility Hobart sank lower, for the pain of his cramped muscles grew worse and worse, making him writhe and groan and strain. Still the moment had not come. I knew that many a life hung on the precision of my conduct, and Captain Mason did not interfere to the slightest extent. At last, when Hobart's dumb pleading had settled on my face and did not rove, I said to Dr. Preston:

"The gag — nothing else — may come away."

He removed it, and Hobart panted:

"Thank you, Doctor. Take the others off, please."

The physician looked to me, but I gave no sign. That started a movement in the crowd, and I had to quell that with a look.

"Let him take 'em off, Mr. Tudor," the prisoner begged.

I nodded, and he was free. He labored weakly to a sitting posture, Dr. Preston assisting. His head rolled, but he breathed deeply, and steadied himself. Dr. Preston felt his pulse.

"May he have water and a wet towel, sir?" he asked me.

I nodded. Hobart drank greedily. Dr. Preston mopped his head and face, and bound the wet towel over his forehead.

"Bring a seat for Hobart," I said to a guard.

Hobart was lifted to it, and thus sat facing the crowd. He had a finer look than I had ever seen from him; he had passed through purgatory. He looked openly at the people, and at last his glance rested on Mr. Vancouver. It seemed to hold a deep meaning. Mr. Vancouver shrank even more than when he had seen the iron hand come down.

I went up to Captain Mason and reported that Hobart was conscious.

The captain nodded, came forward, I beside him, and looked down on the beaten man, who anxiously returned the look.

"May I say a word, Captain?" Hobart asked.

"Certainly."

Hobart turned to me. "You are a hard man," he said, "but square and brave. So are you, Captain Mason. I deserved what I got, and a good deal more. But I'm sorry for what I did, and I ask you to forgive me."

There was frank admiration in Captain Mason's face, for he was observing another strong man emerge from the first hard lesson in a discipline that the sailor had known for many a year.

"May I say something to the boys?" asked Hobart.

"Of course."

Hobart worked round to face his fellow-conspirators. In silence he looked at one after another.

"Boys," he said, "we made a mistake, and are beginning to pay. I don't know what's going to be done with us, but, whatever it is, we must bear it like men. We made an agreement when we came into this valley, and we violated it. What we did might have cost the life of every member of this colony."

He paused, for he was weak, and a deep emotion tore him.

"Boys, if I had been Captain Mason and Mr. Tudor, and had protected and trusted the people as they have done, and they had tried to undermine me, and to benefit themselves to the harm of the others, I would have them taken to the nearest tree, and, God help me! I would have them hanged."

Not a word of that astonishing speech missed an ear in the crowd. When Hobart had ended, his head dropped in dejection.

After a long minute of silence Captain Mason gave me a look. I went to Hobart, who raised a sad face to mine. But when he saw my smile and my extended hand, a glad surprise leaped in him, and his clasp was that of a drowning man.

I walked away. Dr. Preston next received Captain Mason's glance, and the scene was repeated. I did not observe the hint that the president must have given; but while some of the guard came and took Hobart's hand, others were untying the prisoners, and they also came in their turn.

There were tears in Hobart's eyes, and his speech had fled by the time Captain Mason came up and took his hand.

"You are a man, Hobart," said he, and without noting the effect turned to the other conspirators. "Young men," he went on, "you are at liberty. The incident is closed."

Without a glance at the assembled colony, he turned away and went to his hut.

I looked for Beelo, and saw his signal to follow him. A buzzing rose from the crowd. A hard, fixed

look was in Mr. Vancouver's ashen face. Annabel's head rested in her arms on the table, and she was sobbing. From every direction I found furtive glances upon me, and wondered whether I had become a Pariah. The idea was dispelled by the friendly responses that my advances found, but I was uneasy on the score of Beelo.

Chapter XI. *Faces Set Toward Danger.* Lentala in Difficulties. The True Story of the Enterprising Young Men. Mr. Vancouver Faces the Unknown. Beelo Takes Us on a Journey.

Beelo was much excited and torn with impatience when I arrived. Despite that, he regarded me with an odd mixture of awe and fear.

"Choseph!" he exclaimed, "you are terrible and cruel! I couldn't have believed——" His breath gave out.

"What's the news, lad?"

The gentle solicitude in my voice steadied him, and he looked with his sunny smile.

"You are dear old Choseph, aren't you?" he said. "Oh, everything has happened!" he flung out. "The king is terribly angry with Lentala for interfering with the arrest of the young men yesterday. I had to stay with her, and couldn't come. I don't know what trouble will come out of it, but the king is going to bring matters to a head at once, before we are nearly ready! Choseph! those young men ought not to have been let out of the valley. Gato is now on his way to the colony for a man, and you must go there immediately to attend to it. You must decide which man is to go."

His news, breathlessly given, stunned me. It was essential that we both be calm.

"Tell me what happened to the young men," I asked.

"They climbed the wall, and expected to slip through. Why, Senatra men rained on them! Lentala got there as soon as she could with her private guard, but it was too late to save them from a terrible whipping. The guard had them bound and were taking them to the palace when Lentala arrived. She's afraid now that the king will do what he has threatened,— either lock her up or give orders that will tie her hands so that she can't do anything."

I hesitated. "If she is powerless, Beelo, there will be no one to protect the man who will go out with Gato."

His distress was poignant, and he dropped to the ground in a weary little heap.

"Lentala is equal to any task, lad," I quietly said.

He looked up brightly. "Do you believe that much in her, Choseph?"

"She's our one hope, lad, and she'll never falter; and she has your wise little head and your bold heart to help her."

He came strongly to his feet. "She can do anything if you think *that* of her, Choseph," he gently said. Another moment found him his eager, active self. "A great deal will depend on the man you are to send out," he said.

"Why? What awaits him?"

The answer was an appealing look. His remarks about the earthquakes and the storms had puzzled me, and while I knew that the subject was repugnant to him, I was forced to revive it. I repeated a remark by Captain Mason that a storm was brewing. Beelo straightened.

"Captain Mason ought to know!" he cried. "The

king's wise men have told him the same thing. Choseph, Choseph! It would be horrible!"

"Why, lad? I can't work in the dark."

His look was appealing.

"I must know," I said. "You are acting like a child, and this is work for men. Tell me what the storm and the earthquake have to do with us, or I'll refuse to surrender a man to Gato, and we'll fight."

"Choseph!" he exclaimed, frightened; then, after a pause: "The people think the Black Face must have all the castaways, or it will shake the ground with earthquakes and maybe send a volcano to destroy everything. But if the earthquake is heavy, it terrifies the people. In that way you might escape if Lentala's plan fails. It was a great earthquake I was hoping for."

"The Black Face must have all the castaways?" I repeated. "How?"

"I don't know!" he desperately cried. "Lentala doesn't know. It has been concealed from us. But it's something horrible! A storm is coming, but it may bring no castaways, and the king won't wait any longer. He can't control the people."

"What kind of man should we send out, Beelo?"

"One who's brave and fears nothing," he promptly answered, studying me oddly.

"Then Rawley wouldn't do."

"No. Mr. Vancouver."

I had felt it coming. Of course he deserved any risk, any fate, but——

"You are thinking of Annabel," said Beelo.

"Yes. She is innocent. Unless Lentala can keep him away from the king and save him from harm, I won't——"

"There, there, Choseph!" sweetly said the boy. "She'll manage. You'll send Mr. Vancouver?"

"Yes."

"Good! That will make the king think you aren't suspicious. As soon as he has gone with Gato, you and Christopher come here, and then we three will go out of the valley."

Captain Mason's heavy hand still lay as a hush on the camp when Gato, the giant leader of the soldiers, arrived an hour later with a band of his men. Christopher and I met him, and he informed us that he had come for the man who was to be taken out. I despatched Christopher for Captain Mason, whom I had informed of the decision to send Mr. Vancouver out. The storm had been gathering with a slowness that indicated destructive preparation. Mr. Vancouver was in his hut with Rawley and Annabel. Rawley's haggard face peered out at intervals and sent a straining look at me such as I had seen in the faces of the condemned peering through the cell-grate for any messenger that might bear a reprieve. They were not aware of our decision that Mr. Vancouver should go.

The president, cool and serious, came with Christopher.

"Summon Mr. Vancouver," he said.

The three came out. Mr. Vancouver, though pale, had a firm look, and it went straight to Captain Mason. Rawley was ghastly. Annabel held my attention most. Undoubtedly Mr. Vancouver had been trying to prepare her for the contingency of his leaving, and had made poor work of it.

Her glance first sought Captain Mason, and found a blank face with no eyes for her. Next she looked

at me, and caught something that I was too slow in hiding. Thenceforward during the scene I knew that the ache within me for her sake was large print to her eyes. Her bearing was an accusation, a challenge for frankness, an appeal for protection.

The president said:

"Mr. Vancouver, the king has sent for one of our men. It would be my duty to go if I could be spared. Will you go?"

"Certainly," came the prompt answer.

Annabel shrank, and then bravely stepped forth. Her voice lost its quaver as she proceeded.

"Why send my father?" she demanded. "Are there no young men here with the courage to volunteer?"

She eagerly scanned the crowd, not heeding her father's restraining hand on her arm. Being a woman, she could never understand why not a single man made a sign, so heavy was the weight of Captain Mason's hand.

"It is a shame!" she passionately exclaimed. "I had thought there were more manliness and gratitude in the world." She turned upon me. "Mr. Tudor, I know *you* will go."

I could not bear it. "May I tell her in confidence what I am to do?" I asked Captain Mason under my breath.

"Not now," he answered. "Miss Vancouver," he said aloud, "Mr. Tudor cannot go. I beg to remind you that you are interfering with the business in hand."

Recollection of the morning's scene, when a woman had been sent away under guard, must have been what whitened her face with fear and then flushed it with

anger. The lion in her father crouched at Captain Mason, but instantly remembered.

"Daughter," he peremptorily said, "spare us further humiliation. I am going."

"Then, I will go with you!" she exclaimed.

The entire colony was assembled, and all were expecting another measure of authority; but Captain Mason stood in patient silence.

"Impossible, child!" said Mr. Vancouver.

"Yes, I will go!" she cried. "I have a right to go, and I will!"

Mr. Vancouver sent Captain Mason an inquiring look, and found that the blue eyes had hardened. He knew the meaning of that; he must at once eliminate his daughter.

"Child," he coaxed, enclosing her in his arms, "it is impossible,—dangers would arise that wouldn't come if you were absent."

"I can't bear it,—I can't bear it!" she half sobbed. She struggled to free herself. Rawley came forward. "Don't touch me!" she cried. "Isn't there a *man*——"

A glance from Captain Mason sent Christopher to her side.

"It's me, ma'am."

Her father released her, and she turned in astonishment to Christopher. Annabel had a sense of the ludicrous, but one of tenderness also. She saw the angel behind the clown. Smiles went with her tears as she gave him her hand.

"You mustn't go," leaked his thin voice.

"Why?"

"They need you." His gesture swept the camp.

She was silent while she dried her eyes.

"Yes," she said, "but——"

"Them there savagers ud eat you."

"But my father——"

"He ain't nice to eat."

Christopher had laid a daring finger on the mystery, but his words found all unheeding except Mr. Vancouver, who looked startled. The suggestion was evidently new to him.

"Very well, Christopher," Annabel said, smiling sadly, "I'll stay. Captain Mason," falteringly, "I ask your pardon." She turned to her father and embraced him. "Father, go. I'll pray for you." She held him off and looked long into his face. "You'll come back, won't you?"

"Of course. I shall see the king, and I know I can arrange everything happily for the colony."

Captain Mason beckoned Gato. Mr. Vancouver turned his face to the darkness and marched away with the guard.

When he had gone, Annabel still gazed. Rawley watched her for a look that might permit his consoling offices, but she did not see him. Only Christopher knew what to do.

"It's a-wanting of you, ma'am," he said.

She started. "What, Christopher?"

"It's mother, too."

"Yes, yes,—I'd forgotten." Without a glance at any of us, she went to the ailing child.

The colony began to stir. After a hurried conference with Captain Mason, Christopher and I left to keep the appointment with Beelo. We were ready for him when he came all out of breath. It made me

uneasy to note that he studiedly avoided my eyes and made no reference to the scene in camp.

"There's not a moment to lose," he said. "Come; follow me—cautiously." His manner betrayed a nervous haste.

"Beelo!" I said, seeing that he was too much excited.

He stood panting while he got himself in hand, but still kept his face turned from me.

"Now I'm all right," he said.

He threaded the jungle as though every shrub and tree and turning-place were familiar, and held a course on that side of the valley which brought us under the Face.

His agility taxed me. Not so Christopher: his deftness equaled Beelo's. We were a silent trio.

The transverse ridge was crossed, and we entered strange territory. Beelo's eyes and ears were incessantly on watch. Now and then he would come to an abrupt halt and hold his breath, but nothing appeared. We kept to the deepest shadows, which were further blackened by the steadily thickening darkness of the sky. I feared a downpour.

Without mishap we finally reached the lower end of the valley. I had been trying to see the opening through which the stream must run, but even when we halted near the cliff, not a break appeared.

Beelo dropped to the ground. "We'll rest," said he.

I found the adventure exciting, but was unprepared for its effect on Christopher. His usually dull eyes had intelligent vision; his slouchiness was gone.

After a few moments' rest Beelo rose, and led us to the stream. It was deep and slow here, and crept

through a dense overhanging growth. We pushed through the tangle, and soon came to a little clearing near the bank, but screened from it. The bamboo raft which he and Christopher had made lay there.

We launched it. Christopher produced a pole from another hiding-place, boarded the raft, and knelt on the forward end. Beelo and I followed.

"Christopher," the lad inquired, "can you see in the dark?"

"Yes," and Christopher shoved off.

The vegetation grew denser as we slipped along, and its shadows combined with the darkness of the day to plunge us into night. Presently I realized that we must have traversed more than the distance between the launching-place and the wall.

"Where are we, Beelo?" I asked, but the sound of my voice informed me before the boy's answer:

"Under the mountain. We are going through."

To describe my sensations would be impertinent. Beelo's reticence was more than silence. The only sound was the swish of Christopher's pole as it dipped and scraped while we drifted. Beelo, sitting a little to the rear and at one side of me, crept nearer.

"Talk," he begged, edging still closer, till our arms touched.

"Very well, lad. Shall I tell you a story?"

We must have been on the floor of a lofty cavern, for my words came back.

"Hush!" he whispered.

His hand was groping for mine. Perfect blackness encompassed us. I took his hand. A slight tremor thrilled it, and I put an arm about his shoulders, drew him close, and pressed his head down in the hollow of

my neck. There was none of his refractory wildness now. Poor lad! For all the pluck that he had shown in the past, the silence and the darkness of this grewsome passage had unmanned him. It was good to hear the comfort in his sigh, the fading of the tremor, and the firm grasp of his hand.

Evidently Beelo had never made this trip before, but I wondered that at least its upper end had been left unguarded and why it was not a highway for the natives. In a whisper I asked him.

"It *is* guarded," he answered; "but when a storm or an earthquake comes, the men are afraid that what is in here will come out; and, besides, they think a storm is a better guard than they. But they weren't far away. I knew how to avoid them."

"Yes, but——"

"Down!" came sharply from Christopher simultaneously with a dull blow.

I flattened Beelo and myself.

"Up," said Christopher.

Had his face or head encountered a low-hanging rock? Yet he had thought of us.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"Did your head strike?"

"Arm, sir."

Perhaps an inscrutable power had given him the sense to raise his arm and guard his head at the moment of peril. I finished my question to Beelo:

"What is in here the natives fear?"

"The voices that send your words back."

"Surely they are familiar with the echo in the mountains."

"Not this kind, Choseph." He had never called me that so easily. I hugged him closer, and he nestled like a kitten.

It was indeed a startling echo. At times even our whispers seemed to multiply and flock on wings, and come rustling back.

"There's something still worse," added Beelo.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. They would never tell me."

. . . I wondered whether he had felt the sudden leap of my heart. He must, for he snuggled closer, withdrew his hand from mine, caressed my cheek, and whispered:

"We'll be brave."

"Yes, lad, but if we knew only a little we should be the better prepared."

He was silent.

"You know nothing about it?" I insisted.

"Nothing at all."

"But natives have gone through safely, else they wouldn't know."

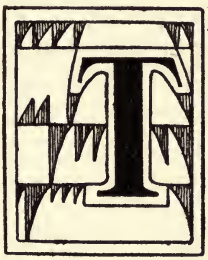
"Some did, a long time ago. That was the last."

"Some did? Not all that started?"

"Not all. The others went mad. Don't talk about it, dear Choseph."

Assuredly Beelo had been driven to a desperate extremity to choose this way of escape from the valley. It showed how closely the ordinary outlets were guarded.

Chapter XII. *Dramatic Discoveries.* Plunged Into Mysterious Terrors. Christopher's Obscure Powers at Work. A Struggle for Our Lives. Stout Hearts Fail. A Dear One Lost.



The passage was crooked. The darkness was unqualified, and so dense that it seemed resistant and hard to breathe. It was the sort of blackness that penetrates to the heart and quenches the light there. Matches had long ago disappeared from the colony, and I had no means of making a light. Nor had Beelo provided against the blackness. All time-reckoning had been lost, but our rate was slow, and I knew that the passage must be long.

Thus far the odors had been of the sun-sweetened water crossed with those of the underground dank, and were pleasant. But presently a faint pungency invaded the cold air. I knew by the change in Beelo's breathing that his quick sense had discovered it. It suggested things over which my memory halted. Christopher gave no sign. With unflagging watchfulness, aided by a perception far keener than mine, he kept the raft free in the stream, except for occasional bumps.

"Do you smell it, Christopher?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"Sir?"

"What is it?"

There was an interval before his answer, "Fire, sir." Beelo cowered in my embrace. Since Christopher

had mentioned it, I knew it was fire; I cannot say how I knew, because the odor was unlike that from any combustion I had ever known.

"Do you know what is burning?" I asked.

"Me, sir?"

"Yes."

This silence was longer than the other; Christopher must have listened far.

"The world, sir."

Beelo shook with a silent chuckle, and squeezed my hand; but I knew that Christopher's words had a meaning.

"The world?" I quietly repeated.

"Yes, sir. I hear it."

Beelo and I straightened up and set our ears on a strain.

"I hear nothing," I said.

"I hear it, very faint," Beelo breathlessly returned.

It made no difference with the steadiness of Christopher's work. The odor gradually grew more pronounced, and then I recalled an iron smelter that I had seen in boyhood. Presently I too heard a distant roar as of a furnace that ground while it burned. Beelo crept close under my arm again. I could feel his quick heart-beats and shortened breathing against my side.

Creeping through these increasing sensations came the deep note of falling water. Why ask Beelo whether he had ever heard that our stream took a subterranean plunge? Christopher kept coolly at his task. The sharp striking and scraping of his tireless pole had long ago informed me that rock made our channel and shores, which were uneven and dangerous. Now and then the raft would make a sudden swing to avoid

underwater rocks that Christopher's soundings had discovered. At other times it would come to a lurching halt until the man carrying our lives in his hand had made sure of the way.

"What do you think of that water falling, Christopher?" I asked.

He waited a long time, and his slow answer chilled me:

"I don't know, sir."

"You'll go slow when we come nearer?"

"Yes, sir."

Beelo gave me a hand-pressure intended to silence my foolish tongue.

With a growing intensity in the odor, in the furnace roar, and in the rumbling of the waterfall, came stealing something new and surpassingly uncanny. It was a very dim glow, with no visible source, and without the power to make anything seen but itself. Apparently it was but the darkness in a more oppressive phase. In vain did I strain my eyes to see Christopher, Beelo, the raft, the water,—anything that light could make visible; but the glow was as impenetrable as the darkness.

Beelo was going to pieces under the weight of this encompassing awe. I knew that his weakness was born of his yielding to an extraneous reliance—Christopher and me. He put his lips to my ear and whispered:

"I'm afraid."

"Steady, lad. You are our guide; you are responsible for us."

"Yes, I know." He made a pathetic effort to regain himself. "This light—don't you *feel* it, Choseph?"

"I do, dear lad, but my name isn't Choseph."

"Yoseph!" he triumphantly said.

"Joseph," I insisted.

"Mr. Tudor!" In a whirlwind he threw both arms round my neck, and softly laughed. The old Beelo was on guard again, except that with his recovered courage he was uncommonly gentle and affectionate. I wondered if I should ever reach the end of the boy's phases.

From some indeterminate direction came the muffled sound of an explosion.

"Hold tight!" cried Christopher, violently lurching the raft round and jamming it sharply against high jutting rocks on the bank. "Down!" he added.

A mighty rush as of many winds came tearing up the passage far ahead. I threw Beelo face down, and flattened my body. Then came the blow, and hurled Christopher backward upon us. In a moment he had recovered himself. The impact must have strained Beelo's ribs, but he lay still.

It was a combination of atmospheric concussion and hot gases, principally steam, that had struck us. I raised my head, gasping for breath. Beelo was inert. I lifted him. One arm feebly groped for my neck, and clung there.

"We are safe!" I cheerily said. "Where is my brave little brother?"

He only held me the closer. Indeed, speech was difficult, since the air was packed with smothering vapors. The desire to breathe was checked by an instinctive fear to inhale.

Christopher cautiously pushed out, and again we drifted free. The pole dipped and clicked and scraped.

But a change had come. The furnace roar had ceased; the waterfall grew louder. Most striking of all was the unearthly luminosity of the steam filling the tunnel. That vapor, rapidly chilling in the cold of the passage, increased in opaqueness, but glowed the more. Before long the light became radiant and faintly illuminating, and the air sweetened. I had known by Beelo's breath on my cheek that his face was upturned to mine, and near. Thus it was that after long peering I found the light in his eyes. My arms were enclosing him.

"I see my lad!" I said in gladness.

A queer little movement of withdrawal began. I tried to hold him, but found no yielding. Gradually he slipped out of my clasp, and sat alone.

Christopher slowly took body in the haze, a ghostly Charon on the Styx. The color of the glow grew from white to rose, with an occasional effulgence of bluish purple. The surface of the earth knew no such tints in fire; these were royally plutonic. The black rocks overhead and on either hand assumed a vague, grim definition, and to my keyed fancy displayed grotesque suggestions. Blank spaces a shade darker than the grimacing, minatory rocks fell away; these I supposed to be cavernous reaches out of the passage, for from them came echoed multiples of the pole-sounds.

The temperature began to rise as the waterfall grew louder, the light more revealing, the haze weaker. We swung round a wide curve, and all at once a terrifying vision sprang forth in a blood-red light. Our stream opened into a small lake, which was violently churned by a cataract of crimson water brilliantly illuminated and plunging out of the overhead darkness into it. The roar was deafening.

Beelo, scrambling in terror to his feet, his eyes blazing with the red madness that packed the cavern, required a strong hand to subdue him. He struggled in my grasp, pointed frantically backward with implorings that we return, and fought my restraint with sheer animal desperation. Christopher's conduct, though showing extraordinary exhilaration, betrayed no fear, but only a grimmer hold on our situation. With a rearward glance and the discovery that I was holding Beelo securely, he stood up, a gigantic red figure, and with all his might shot the raft forward into the maelstrom. The frail thing plunged in the surge, but Christopher's eye and arm were sure. The suck of the water, curving downward where the cataract struck the pool, was cunningly avoided as he circled the rim of the lakelet, having as able work to do in avoiding the dripping rocks there as in keeping out of the breakers.

I thanked God there was light, formidable though it was; it helped me in my control of Beelo, whose struggles were becoming weaker, and enabled me to find a good grip on the raft, for there was danger of slipping off. Through all the wild lurching Christopher kept a sailor's feet; and, although his back was toward me, I saw by his quick movements that all his shrewd forces were in the fight.

Whence came the light? It appeared to be in the cataract itself, a living flame in the heart of its greatest enemy. The water was joyously, terribly alive.

The raft described an arc of the pool, slipped out of the boiling churn, and, before Christopher was aware, caught an eddy and went swinging and lurching in behind the cataract. The man so strong in both soul and body threw up his hands in the surrender of terror,

for a thing more awful than the red light and the waterfall confronted us. He dropped the pole. Its middle struck the edge of the raft, and our one weapon of defense rebounded into the water. Beelo saw the catastrophe. He clutched me frantically about the neck, nearly strangling me before I broke his hold.

Christopher looked about for the pole, and saw it bobbing on end as it struggled against submergence in the down-thrust behind the fall. It was twenty fatal feet away. The ferocity of elemental self-preservation seized on the man and transformed him. This was not the attitude of patient, gentle Christopher, the humble, serving Christopher, but that of a bayed animal. My hands were tied by the necessity of Beelo's care.

The spectacle that had unmanned Christopher was in a profound recess reaching indeterminately out of the cavern and behind the waterfall. It had not been visible until we rounded the fall and went scurrying behind it in the eddy. Apparently far back,—I cannot guess how far,—ran a broad, high, fantastically irregular tunnel ending in a pit of boiling lava, at an unknown depth below the level of the tunnel, which itself was slightly above the surface of the pool. Deep rumblings issued from it, as from a heavy ebullition, punctured with smothered detonations. Rising from it were thin, cloud-like masses of vapor, like the pale mauve haze of distant mountains. In its rolling it thickened concealingly here and opened revealingly there, with constantly shifting effects.

The dominant color was a deep, transparent crimson of a tint such as may be seen in the cooling iron of a foundry or in the great crater of Kilauea; but following the detonations came leaping flames of bluish

purple. It was the red shining through the water that had made the cataract a fall of liquid crimson when seen from the front.

This, then, was the funnel of a volcano, with a lateral vent. Was it one of Pluto's cooling forges? Was its present activity transient? Was this the beginning of a seismic convulsion that might blow the valley rampart into the sea?

I cannot say when those questions arose. The urgency of an immediate threat demanded all attention. Beelo was in an ecstasy of terror, and Christopher was desperately casting about with all his reassembled wits. In the tumult of noises our voices were useless. We had been flung out of the larger eddy into a smaller one swirling between the back of the fall and the tunnel-mouth. It had a swifter and more dizzying whirl. Soon it seemed that we were still, except for the ceaseless rolling of our craft, and that the roaring fall and the grumbling, blazing tunnel were swinging round us. With the rest passed the bobbing pole, a live, insane thing, nodding this way and that, approaching the downpour gingerly, diving under a sharp water-blow, and leaping up with malicious sprightliness a few feet back. At any moment it might be caught sidewise and crushed.

There was another danger. The centrifugal force of our swing in the eddy was carrying us out to the periphery of the swirl. On one side were the rocks at the mouth of the tunnel; opposite was the waterfall, the slightest blow from which (since it fell from a height of at least a hundred feet) would mean the end. Our swinging was taking us nearer to both those dangers.

Something roused within, overcoming my pity for Beelo. I shook him and slapped his cheek. Astonishment and anger blazed in his eyes, and then with a mighty indignation he crawled away and sat glaring at me. At another time the comical picture would have amused me, for the boy behaved just as a proud kitten under similar treatment. Having secured the desired result with Beelo, I worked to the edge of the raft, and prepared to make a leap for the pole. I was waiting till the raft should swing round and bring me nearer. Before that happened, two soft arms were flung round me from behind, a cheek pressed mine, and I was borne down backward. Two small, firm hands held my wrists down. For the moment I was helpless.

Of course, Christopher knew that our nearer approach to danger brought us closer to hope, which lay in the pole. He was biding the moment, and it came. He crouched on the raft, and a long arm shot out. Beelo's nerves were quivering till Christopher rose; then they stilled, and he released me.

Christopher had learned from experience, and it was a surer hand now that gripped the pole and sent the raft spinning out of the eddy. To keep it somewhat trimmed against Christopher's movements had been a small part of my task hitherto, so thoughtful of everything had he been; but now that he saw Beelo and me better used to the situation, he quietly gave us something of that to do, thus securing more freedom of movement.

He found the egress of the stream from the pool, and pushed out. Slowly we crept through the gloomy, misty light, which paled as we went. Christopher

must have felt a dread that oppressed me — the danger of recurrent explosions — for he worked with less extreme caution than before, and our progress was better. After a time the light was too dim for me to see Beelo sitting in his sullen pout; and when darkness again fell, he crept up beside me and stole out a hand for mine. The noises had nearly ceased, and Beelo no longer feared the weird echoes.

"I'm glad it's past," he sighed, nestling against me. "Aren't you, Choseph?"

"Joseph."

He hugged my arm and softly laughed.

"Yes, I'm glad," I answered.

It seemed many hours since we had entered the passage, and I hoped we should emerge in the morning of the day following that of our start.

New conditions began to arise. Above the cataract the stream had been slow, with few approaches to rapids. Those had been the worst danger-points. Now we discovered that the current was swifter and the rapids more numerous and turbulent. The celerity of Christopher's movements increased. He no longer tried to spare us the water dripping from his pole as he repeatedly shifted it and groped for bearings. This made me more apprehensive. I wondered whether, even with better facilities, we could return to the valley through this passage, and how the two hundred and fifty colonists could manage to come safely through.

Presently I felt in the water a turgidity where the current was slow, and heard a hoarse, growling rumble quite different from the sounds that we had left behind. Beelo tightened his clutch and breathlessly said:

"It has come!"

"What has, lad?"

"Hush!"

Except for an unusual slapping of the water against the rocks, the commotion had passed. I wondered if the storm had broken in the valley and the torrent was coming; but this did not look like it.

"It has gone, Beelo. What was it?"

"No, it hasn't. Hold tight. Sit hard, Christopher!"

"Beelo," I impatiently demanded, "you must tell me what——"

The speech was stopped by a groaning crunch that tossed the stream, splashed the water high on the rocks, and filled the passage with a sound like that of crushing glass. Beelo was again in terror.

"Be quiet, lad. There's nothing——"

"Don't talk!" he desperately commanded. "The third one will come. That's the worst. Wait!"

The seconds dragged through an awful silence. Beelo's breath struggled spasmodically through the repression under which he tried to hold it.

The third shock came, and then, though I had never felt one before, I knew what it was. The whole world seemed to heave and writhe and jolt and grind, all with a fearful noise. The earthquake, grim brother of the boiling cauldron we had left, had us in its jaws, and its power was manifest in the ease with which it crushed and ground the rocks about us. Fragments of these began to splash in the water and rattle on the raft. Just in front, a huge block plunged into the stream and dashed us with water.

Beelo flung himself upon me; I again bent over him to shield him.

Another heavy stone struck the raft in the narrow space between Christopher and us, and tore through it into the water, sending up a geyser through the hole.

A stiffening wave of terror overswept Beelo. He sprang to his knees and tightly embraced my neck in both arms.

"We are going to die!" he feebly cried, and pressed his lips to mine, sinking inert into my arms. My fingers anxiously sought his pulse. It was fluttering.

"Christopher!" I called in alarm,—not realizing that the earthquake had passed and that a dim light made visible the rocks in a turn ahead,—"Christopher! Something has happened to Beelo!"

"Yes, sir," came with the steady old calm.

"Stop! We must do something for him."

"We are going out, sir."

We swung the curve, and the blessed daylight smiled ahead. The raft slid out of the passage in placid water, which here, as at the other end, was deeply embowered. The glorious day, though overcast, was brilliant to our eyes as it sifted through and rested sweetly on the water. As Beelo was unconscious, Christopher observed extraordinary care in proceeding, and as soon as possible secured the raft in the sheltered reach.

I was looking down into Beelo's face. His head had fallen back, and although his eyes were closed, his lips were open. It came over me with a pang that a richness and a maturity which I had not before noticed in his face, rested there now.

"How long has it taken us to come through?" I asked Christopher.

"'Mos' four hours, sir."

I was surprised. It had seemed much longer.

He came to lift Beelo out, but I myself bore him ashore and laid him on the ground, and knelt over him. Christopher was standing near, studying him, but showing no anxiety.

"It is only fainting, isn't it, Christopher?" I asked.

"That's all, sir."

To give him air, I began to open his blouse.

"I wouldn't, sir," interposed Christopher.

"Why?" I asked, looking up in surprise.

He only regarded me in silence. At first I thought that Christopher's singular penetration had discovered that Beelo was lighter of color than a full-blooded native and was delicately warning me not to invade the carefully guarded secret. I recalled the story that I had told Beelo, and my suspicions as to the purity of his native blood. And what harm could come if I did learn?

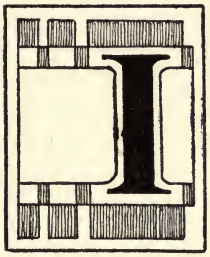
Then the truth came upon me with the overwhelming force of long cumulation. His conduct in the tunnel, his sweetness and gentleness, the strange conclusion of the scene with Annabel when they had met,— a thousand memories of things that had passed unheeded in the stress of dangers,— came as a blinding light. I do not know when Christopher learned the truth, but in his chivalry he would have seen me go blind to the grave without a word from him in betrayal of Beelo's secret.

The shock stunned me, and my head was bowed in reverence. When I again looked into the patient face, now having for me so sweet and touching a pathos, the deep-blue eyes were looking up into mine; then they turned to Christopher, and all about. The old

mischievous, bantering smile parted the perfect lips. The eyes again sought mine.

"Choseph! It's fine to be dead!" But the voice held a different music from that of the lad whom I had loved and who was now gone forever.

Chapter XIII. *Preparation for the Crisis.* In the Enemy's Land. The Weird Light on the Valley Wall. Mr. Vancouver. A Visit with Lentala. She Tells a Secret Which I Already Know.



I Would respect Beelo's wish that she appear as a boy, and must keep hammering into my mind the words, Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother. I must not for a moment think of her otherwise. "Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother."

"What are you dreaming, Choseph, and what are those words your lips are saying?" It was Beelo's cheery voice.

He was sitting up; I was beside him looking down at the gliding water. I woke to the familiar raillery, and turned with a smile.

"Dear lad!" I joyfully responded.

"You had forgotten me," he ruefully said. "And you, old Christopher! Don't you see I'm dying of thirst?"

Christopher plucked two large leaves, fashioned them into a cup, and brought the water, which Beelo eagerly drank. He held out his hand, and I helped him up. He tried his legs.

"That's better," he said.

The perfect grace of movement, the exquisite feminine figure so artfully concealed,——

"Boy, Lad, Dear Little Brother."

"Mooning again, and talking to yourself!" cried Beelo.

"It was a rough trip through the passage, boy. I'm a little shaken."

"That's past. Shake the other way." He was pirouetting round a tree.

"But how are we going back, lad?"

"This way," he carelessly answered, making wing-motions with his arms.

"There was an earthquake, Beelo."

He stopped short, and his eyes lighted deep.

"Yes!" he softly but impressively exclaimed.

The old caution settled in his face; he peered and listened warily, and then came a look of assured repose.

"That is good," he said,—"if—" a cloud drifted over his face—"if they felt it on the surface."

"They did," interposed Christopher.

"How do you know?" Beelo sharply demanded.

Christopher pointed to a large rock near us, to the path that it had freshly torn through the brush, and to a steep slope from which it had been dislodged.

"Good for Christopher!" said Beelo. He studied the sky, and dejectedly added, "But the storm is coming!" After a little reflection he remarked, as if to himself, "I don't know whether that should change our plans or not." He seated himself to think it out, and began arranging twigs on the ground. "No Senatras will be within miles of the passage," he ruminated. "They fear it, for the earthquake is born here, and they have run away. So, we can make better time. Mr. Vancouver is safe today; we won't go *there*."

"Where, dear little brother?"

Pain crossed his face. "To the clearing opposite the Face. If only another earthquake would come, or this had come sooner!"

"Is one usually followed by another?"

"Often. Sometimes not. Come! The sun will be setting before long, and we have miles to go."

We hid the battered raft and struck out. Our way led parallel to the stream, which tore foaming down a gorge of steeply sloping sides. It slipped into a pleasant valley, richly verdured. There we left it and began the ascent of a mountain on the west. Dusk was coming on. Beelo fearlessly pursued the trails in the darkening hours.

Occasionally we paused to rest. The valley which we had crossed lay a black-green sea below. Behind us the eastern sky was cut straight across by the level summit of our valley wall. Beelo was closely studying it.

"You see no sign of fire over there, do you?" he asked, pointing toward the clearing opposite the Face.

There was none, and Beelo was gratified. Our attention was diverted from that spot by a faint purplish flash, which slipped along the crest above the river passage, and was quickly gone. Beelo stood tense and still, and whispered:

"Did you see *that?*"

"Yes."

We waited for its reappearance, but none came. Beelo said no more. The light had come from the subterranean lava-pot.

Beyond the wall was the blackest part of the sky. Under the horizon in that direction lightning was at play, as we judged from faint illuminations in the distant heavens, and the rumble of far thunder.

Night had nearly fallen when we reached the summit. The descent was rapid on the other side, for Beelo went with the sureness of familiarity. At last

we stopped at an abandoned hut, hidden in the deep forest. Beelo paused on the door-step.

"See," he said, pointing to a glow a mile or less away, down the valley. "That is the main settlement of the Senatras. The king's palace, where Lentala and I live, is there. We will visit it tonight,—if Lentala agrees. You will rest here awhile and have something to eat. After the visit to the palace you will sleep here."

He showed us within, closed the door, blew a flame from smothered embers on the hearth, and lighted a nut-oil lamp. He had been very sober and quiet all the way, but now his eyes began to dance.

"This is your mansion!" he exclaimed.

The place had been made clean and sweet, good beds of leaves were on the earth floor, and fresh water stood in calabashes. Beelo dragged forward a copper vessel, and took from it a generous food supply.

"Isn't she pretty good—for a girl?" he casually asked.

"Who?"

"Lentala. She did these things."

Ever since the scene at the end of the passage, sadness had sat upon me, and I was in no mood to enjoy Beelo's pleasantries,—this, too, while I was deeply touched by the labor and gentle thoughtfulness with which everything had been done for our comfort. Still, something precious was gone from my life; my heart hungered for the lad. But he was here! In a swirl of perversity I seized Beelo's hands, and held him before me.

"Dear lad," I said, "I am walking in the dark. Believe me, little brother, I am grateful—more

grateful than any words could say — for the skill and the kindness that we have seen from you. But my heart is sore, and you are laughing at me."

Something between suspicion and embarrassment had been rapidly growing in Beelo's face. Of a sudden he closed my mouth with his hand and made a brave rally of Beelo's old flippancies.

"Christopher," he said, "did you ever see such a goose? Such an *old* goose?"

I gently removed his hand.

"I am serious, boy."

"Hush!" commanded Beelo in a whisper.

His hunt down into me was ruthless, but the hurt there helped me to steady my gaze. "When I fainted ——" he began, and stopped, having found my face expressionless. He turned to Christopher, who, giving no attention to us, was setting out the supper on a mat. Beelo's sharp eyes came back to me.

"Dear little brother,——"

"No, no! Not a word!" he broke in. "I haven't time, and you are hungry. Come, Choseph!"

He turned me to the supper and forced me to sit on the ground opposite Christopher. It was pleasant to be man-handled by Beelo. His abuse of me was always smoothed by affection. I had no appetite, but who could resist Beelo? He played that I was an invalid and unable to help myself. He patted my cheek, put food into my mouth, chattered nonsense as though I were a baby, and petted me with outrageous condescension. There was nothing to do but melt under his dear absurdities; and when he found me re-established, he kissed me on the forehead and dashed out, calling that he would be back before long.

When he returned he was brilliantly alive. There seemed no end to his vitality.

"It's glorious!" he cried, seizing Christopher and sending his bulk in a twirl across the hut. "It's splendid!" he went on, smashing my dignity with boy's-play. "It's just——" But his breath was gone, and he tumbled in a panting heap on the ground.

"What news, Beelo?" I inquired.

He sat up, but as yet had meager breath for speech.

"Mr. Vancouver—is safe. Doesn't look very—happy. Hasn't seen—the king. Oh, no! Lentala,—who is an Angel—and Sweet—and Kind—and Beautiful,—is just dying—to see you. And——"

"Rest a minute," I interrupted.

He flung a little pout at me, and then archly demanded, "Aren't you good-natured yet, Choseph?"

I shook my head.

"You will be when you see Lentala," he said with mock melancholy. "Don't you like girls?" he suddenly fired at me.

"Y—es," I stammered consciously.

"You like Annabel!" with a spitfire touch on his tongue.

"I once liked, very much, a dear lad named Beelo more than any girl."

"*Once* liked Beelo!" His shining eyes were lances.

"I like him just as much yet—when he is Beelo."

I knew by his start that the thin ice on which I walked was cracking.

"And what is he when he isn't Beelo?"

"A little devil."

He laughed. "You aren't *quite* dead," he said, and a briskness sprang into his manner. "We must go.

Most of the Senatras have already gone to sleep. Come."

He rapidly led us into the valley, meanwhile instructing us how to respond if greeted. The natives were not garrulous nor inquisitive, and we passed unnoticed, until the outskirts of the settlement were reached. There, in a dimly lighted hut, Mr. Vancouver was resting under guard, Beelo informed us. A barely visible figure challenged Beelo. The prompt response made the shape sink from view.

"We haven't time to see Mr. Vancouver now," said the lad to us.

A turn in a lane lined with huts brought us into a beautiful highway, broad and white, and picketed with odorous trees which arched overhead. The darkness would have been profound but for a diffused light which glowed ahead upon something white. We went rapidly toward it, and found it to be a high stone wall; the light was from two lamps on posts where the highway swung to the left and ran at the foot of the wall.

Instead of following the main road Beelo turned into a narrow way to the right. The overhead growth was so dense that the light from the lamps was soon lost, but Beelo knew the way. At last he stopped, and slipped a key into a lock. The heavy wooden door, plated and strapped with iron, suggested a postern in an archaic fortress. He led us within and secured the door.

The nearer approach of the storm brought lightning, which increased Beelo's caution while revealing glimpses of our environment. In the region behind the wall the verdure was less dense and more orderly than in the park through which we had come. The

lightning made the open spaces embarrassing to our guide, who hurried us across them to the shadows. Finely kept paths wound and intersected, but Beelo knew shorter routes. A rising wind assisted the stealth of our progress.

He brought us under the shadow of a low arcade, open on one side, and closed on the other with a long stone house. The pillars were massed in vines. Here the darkness was intense. The stone floor gave no sound under our tread.

Beelo stopped us, advanced a few paces, and rapped on a door. It was cautiously opened, but we could not see within as Beelo entered. A very faint light barely made him visible.

"Lentala!" he whispered, "they are here."

A voice fuller and mellower than Beelo's yet much like his, answered, "Yes? I had given you up, and was undressing for bed."

"You'll dress?" Beelo spoke nervously.

"Yes. Tell them to wait a little while. They are safe out there. Beelo, the king is furious because you ran away tonight. He is waiting for you. Go at once. It is something about the man from the colony." I resented her domineering manner toward Beelo.

"Very well. I'll be back as soon as I can," he answered sweetly.

Coming back to us, he began to explain, but I told him we had heard. A reassuring hand was given to each of us, and he was hurrying across the garden fronting the arcade. He halted and came back.

"Don't stay with Lentala longer than ten minutes," he earnestly said. "The king may detain me. If I don't come, can you find your way back?"

I assured him that we could, and that even should he come, we would not let him conduct us to the hut.

He gave my hand a grateful little squeeze as he slipped the gate-key into it, and darted away, saying:

"Wait at Lentala's door till she opens it."

Presently she bade us enter. Instead of her barbarous but highly becoming dress at the feast, with neat jacket and short skirt blazing with gold embroidery, she now wore a plain, loose garment. It was partly redeemed by a low cut in the neck, a splendid girdle consisting of a heavy and elaborately linked chain of gold, and a necklace of wonderful diamonds.

I could not have explained why this dazzling woman, who had filled so wide a space in my fancy, now looked a negligible quantity, an intrusion. There was little of the sparkle that I had expected. The child-like coquetries, the careless abandon, the subtleties that had flitted so unconsciously through the conduct of the Lentala I remembered,— these and a thousand other graces were absent from the sedater young woman smiling upon us and composedly seating us.

She had greeted us with a warning finger on her lips.

"My servants," she explained in a low, rich voice, "are all in bed and asleep. But they are not far away, and we must be careful." There was a curious reminder of Annabel's preciseness in this new Lentala.

She must have felt my discomfort, for she let some of her consciousness slip away, and a dash of her native wildness gradually returned.

"Beelo has told me everything," she said; "I'll not trouble you with questions. And we are not to discuss any plans tonight."

The beauty and richness of the room came forth,

faint in the light of suspended lamps, which, clouded in thin fabrics, cast no shadows and softened all contours. A rich massing of hammered gold and silver, of exquisite bronzes and ivories, of hangings and rugs, was softened to grace by their perfect arrangement, and over that in turn was a fine breath of daintiness. My astonishment grew as the significance of it came over me. Did this girl, all seeming innocence, gentleness, and kindness, *feel* none of the crime and blood with which these treasures were drenched? Yet only the sweetest of spirits could have cast upon this charnel-house loot the cleansing that held its grisly suggestion back.

She had been moving about and gently chatting, and I had made empty responses. At last I discovered that she was growing nervous. A heavy crash of thunder brought out the cause. She looked anxious, and said:

"The storm is near. You must go before it breaks. Beela"—I noted her odd pronunciation of the final syllable—"said that if he didn't return in ten minutes you must go without him, but I can't think of that. He has been gone much longer."

I tried to assure her that we could go alone, but still she was uneasy. Christopher and I rose. She came and laid a hand on my arm.

"Wait a little while." She hesitated over the next words. "Do you like Beela—Beelo?"

"Very much," I answered dully.

A liquid softness entered her beautiful eyes, and with it a sparkle of the old Lentala—and of Beelo too.

"I am going to tell you a secret," she went on. "You will keep it?—and you, Christopher? And you'll not let Beelo know?"

We pledged ourselves. She removed her hand, looked down, and while busying herself with a readjustment of her girdle, said, very low:

"Beelo isn't a boy."

Her fingers stopped in her acute tension. I stood silent. With an effort she raised her eyes to mine, and hers betrayed a keen suspense.

"Beelo is a girl," she added, as though I had not heard. "Her name is Beela." She found my look coolly meeting hers.

"You liked Beelo the boy," she groped on; "don't you like Beela the girl?"

"I — I'm not acquainted with her," I fumbled.

For a moment the Lentala of the feast returned in a look of mischievous amusement, followed by one of pretended sorrow. I was enjoying the fine play in her face.

"But don't you see," she asked, "that in knowing and liking the boy, you knew and liked the girl?"

It would have been impossible for me to make her understand that I was not nimble in violent readjustments; so I held my peace.

"She was Beela the girl all the time," Lentala insisted. "It couldn't have been anything but the girl in her that you cared for." She did not know in the least that she was talking to the wind.

"Of course," agreed I, very uncomfortable.

My tone made her turn impatiently away. With much spirit she went on as with ease and softness she paced the floor:

"After all she has done, too! I don't see ——"

"Lentala!" I interrupted; "don't misunderstand. I do like ——"

"No, you don't!" Her voice was growing unsteady. "My poor little Beela! I *know* she's a madcap, but she is good, she is kind. She *had* to be a boy. I *made* her be one. She couldn't have done what she did——"

"Lentala, please——"

"—— unless she *was* a boy. And now she is shamed and humiliated! Don't let my sweet sister ever know that. It would break her heart. Poor little Beela!"

"This is all wrong. I——"

"Even for *my* sake you might be generous. It is——"

Three strides brought me to her, and I was unconscious of the power in my angry grip on her wrist, but her tongue went silent. She raised her eyes under the compulsion of mine.

"That is enough," I said.

There was a moment's matching of our forces. A ripple of mischievous and innocent surprise animated her, and she laughed with the glee of a gentle child. She was very much like her sister then.

A deepening thunder-crash came.

"You must go — now! I'm going with you. I won't let you——"

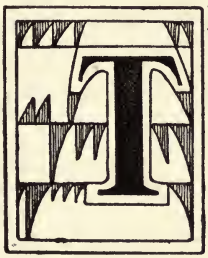
"You shall not go," I firmly said.

"I *must*. I *want* to. I'll get a——"

"No, Lentala. Good-night."

As I was turning away, I saw the second time in her face the look of one whose road has stopped at a wall. When I smiled and bowed to her as Christopher and I were passing out, she was standing where I left her, looking blankly at me.

Chapter XIV. *A Glimpse Into the Abyss.* The Fate Awaiting Mr. Vancouver. We Play a Trick on the Natives. My Nerves Give Way. A Ghastly Hint from Christopher. A Perilous Place.



The drenching, thunder-ridden storm was so favoring that I determined to investigate Mr. Vancouver's circumstances, and, if possible, ascertain the plans focusing in him; for since the discovery of Beela's sex, her horror and timidity concerning those intentions were explained. I must now take the lead, since the work was not fitted to a woman.

No guards were outside Mr. Vancouver's hut when we arrived, and the wetting of the ground silenced our footfalls. My impulse was to enter, and cautiously ascertain the truth; but I realized that the risk was great. In creeping round the hut we overheard two native men talking near the rear wall.

"Hush!" continued one of the voices. "He is groaning again, and may wake."

In a little while the other remarked, "He is asleep. What were you telling me?"

"The king is very uneasy. The people all know that the white man is here."

"Is there dry wood?"

"Yes. It is stored in a thatch hut on the east side of the clearing. The people are clamoring for the white man to be taken to the stone."

"That can't be done while the storm rages."

"No; but the first hurricane never lasts long. The king has promised Gato that the white man shall be sent to the fire as soon as this storm passes. That may be tomorrow."

"Does the white man suspect?"

"Undoubtedly. He frets and groans."

"What are these stories about the Black Face?"

"The scouts sent by Gato say that it looks more ferocious than ever."

"Does the king realize that the people will rise unless he consents to the offering?"

"I don't know. He is silent and deeply troubled. Danger stops any direction that he can take. But Gato is ready."

A horror that I felt rather than understood came over me, and, fearing that I should betray our presence by some rash act, I was creeping away, when I discovered that Christopher, moving similarly, had started before me. Every tree-branch was a tempting club with which to break a savage head and free the prisoner.

Instead of returning to our hut, we went to the summit of the wall enclosing our valley. Clearly Christopher required no explanation to understand my purpose. With slow, sure caution we took an eastwardly course, parallel with the brink of the precipice and at a safe distance from any men that might be patrolling it. From time to time we would stop, creep nearer the edge, make a careful inspection, return in silence, and go on. The violence of the storm abated somewhat, thus making our progress swifter, but more risky.

With true instinct Christopher went straight to

what we had been seeking,— the opening in the forest on the top of the wall fronting the Face. The clear space was smooth, level rock. One segment of the nearly circular opening was cut off by the sheer drop of the precipice. Near that edge was an exquisitely built circular stone platform some four feet high and ten in diameter. As we worked round for a nearer view, we discovered on its top old marks of fire which the rains had not washed off. I recognized it as the object that I had seen from the valley, opposite the Face. There was a moon, but only a faint glow from it filtered through the clouds; occasional flashes of lightning gave us clearer seeing. The air was stifling.

We edged nearer to the cliff, and stood peering across the valley as we waited for light. It came, and revealed the Face. The sodden, sordid, worse than bestial mask, more repulsive than ever in the gloom of the storm, held its gaze fixed upon us. We were upon the scene of the unthinkable tragedy awaiting Mr. Vancouver.

We circled the eastern edge of the clearing. Soon we found a squat structure of thatch, half hidden in the edge of the forest. It was filled with neatly piled firewood. No surprise showed in Christopher's face.

After further exploration of the vicinity, and satisfied that the place was unguarded, we loaded ourselves with wood from the hut, and plunged into the thicket. A short distance away I had discovered a deep cleft. We threw our loads into it; the fall was long before the sound came from the bottom. Thus, after many trips, we disposed of all the fuel, and hastened back to our hut for sleep. The night was far gone.

The storm broke afresh, and I lay sleepless, and

listened to the elemental furies at play. Every nerve ached, and sleep was a sore need. Contingencies riding the hurricane would likely offer still heavier work for tomorrow. Whatever innocent pranks Beela might indulge, her profound seriousness and her appreciation of the dangerous risks in this undertaking were genuine.

With the swirl and dash of the rain came the roar of the tearing wind and the mighty bellow of thunder. Flash, peal, and boom rended the firmament. Our cabin braced itself and strained under the tug, as though digging its claws into the ground to hold firm. Large trees on the slope behind us fell crashing.

This was more than a hurricane: it was a tornado; perhaps worse yet, a typhoon. Many ships ride out the worst of these; but mentally I saw brown men being told off to man the promontories of the bight, and to watch for staggering, heart-broken specks on the sea as the wind following the hurricane urged them on slowly to a pleasant beach, five hundred swordsmen, an oily savage king and a feast, and a march over the mountain to a guarded paradise; thence to be "sent away" to their homes — their eternal homes — one at a time! one at a time! So far as civilization had reached, it had strangled an unspeakable practice in these seas.

Not even the churn of the storm in my veins could check the cold that ran in my blood. Was the father of Annabel to be only the first? Were we waiting as fattening hogs, instead of being out and afield, fighting a way to liberty, and dying, if we must, as men should? . . .

I found myself off the pallet and rolling on the floor.

"Christopher?" I called, staggering to my feet.

"Sir?"

I knew by the nearness of his voice that he was already beside me, but invisible in the blackness.

"Light the lamp. We are going to dress."

He obeyed without a word. I was feverishly rummaging for my clothes.

"There, sir," he said, pointing to my moccasins, but neglecting to fetch them to me.

I had forgotten that my dress was Senatra and that moccasins were the only part of it I had removed. I made a blundering affair of putting them on, for the clutch of my hand was shaped better for a bludgeon just then. Christopher was observing me with a mild, exasperating patience.

"Put yours on," I roughly commanded.

He made still denser the stupidity in his stare, and stood still.

"Hurry!" I cried.

"Sir?"

"Hurry, I say! You are going too."

"Me?"

"Yes! We are going to take Mr. Vancouver away from those beasts."

Without a change of expression he made a pretense of preparation. In doing so, he edged up to the barred door, placed his wide back against it, and calmly faced me.

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded in a fury.

"Sir?"

"Stand aside, Christopher!"

"Me, sir?"

In exasperation I seized the copper vessel and advanced upon him. Not a muscle of his body moved; his ape-like arms hung loose; his hands were open. But it was not his defenselessness that stayed me. Far more potent was the deep devotion in his eyes, which held a profounder sadness than usual. It was a dash of cold water on my heat, but not my determination. In all kindness I would reason with him.

"Christopher," I asked, "do you know what they are going to do with Mr. Vancouver?"

He omitted his formula, and simply gazed at me.

Then I told him, in raw, sore words. It was the first time they had been spoken by a member of the colony.

I was astonished at his placidity on hearing them.

"Do you understand?" I had to thunder the question above the outer din.

But he was listening to sounds that the storm did not make. I waited impatiently.

"They won't him, sir, if they get you."

"Why not?"

"You're younger 'n' fatter."

Like most other of Christopher's remarks, this one dealt in a conclusive terminal, omitting postulate and explication; but I understood. He had told a long and dramatic story in those halting words—our blind assault, our being beaten down and secured, and then the awful end. I wondered at that, and longed for the power to see into the working of his strangely luminous mind, its far light behind its frontal darkness.

"And there ain't no dry wood, sir."

The last of the ice in my blood broke and ran melting before him. I was very tired, and found myself

shifting on my feet like a drunken man. Tongues of flame began to slip through the hut and dart hither and thither with curious dips and turns. Some of them were purple, but the most were crimson. A luminous vapor crept in. The boom of a waterfall rumbled; and then came a crashing subterranean detonation. Christopher was a gigantic ape floundering in a drowning sea of steam.

"Christopher!" I cried, trying to catch the wall as it swung past.

A firm, gentle arm went round me—an arm of a strength so great that my most desperate struggles could not break its hold, yet I was a very strong man. Slowly I was borne down on my pallet, and a thin, soothing voice came with a hand that tenderly closed my eyes and held the lids down. My breathing came easier.

* * * * * * * * *

It was daylight, and Christopher was standing in the open door, looking out. The rain had ceased, but the morning brightness was smothered under the overhead lowering. The pleasant odor of coffee perfumed the hut. Without appearing to notice my waking, Christopher served my breakfast, but said nothing. A dull lassitude made the straw bed more inviting than my feet.

Beela's cheery good-morning an hour later was checked in alarm when she entered and found me prone; but her electric vitality palpitated through me and brought me smiling to a sitting posture. Her inquiring look at Christopher read nothing in the bland face. A shadow of uneasiness drifted through her eyes, but she drove it away.

"Good!" she said. "I'm glad you are resting. Lie down again." She dropped to a seat beside me on the straw, and pushed my head down.

"That's better,—Choseph." Her hand was on my forehead.

"Joseph," I insisted.

"You don't like the way I talk, Ch — Dzhoseph?" banteringly, stealing sly hands to mine and pretending to stare mockingly at me while peering into my eyes.

"Very well, Beelo. Did you square yourself with the king and have a good rest last night?"

"Of course. Do you think any king ——"

"Stop that."

"What?"

"Trying to see if I'm sick. Even though I were dead, your coming would bring me to life."

"My! Did you hear that, Christopher?"

The sensible man did not answer, nor even look at her. She made a mouth at his back, withdrew her hand, and edged away a few inches. Had I made a slip after that confidence and caution from Lentala? I roused myself.

"What's the news, little brother? What game and what killing today?"

Her face fell grave. "Something has happened with you since I saw you last night, Choseph."

I told her all, and she held her breath over the audacity of our work.

"I — I shouldn't have dared to suggest it," she said with charming helplessness as she gave Christopher and me a look of wondering admiration. "It was splendid, Choseph!" Her dear leaning girlishness, so natural and unconscious, started a tumult in me, and it

was hard for me to keep the deception of her sex at work. "Now," she went on, "Mr. Vancouver is safe so long as the weather is bad; and when it clears, time will be needed to gather dry wood. We'll do nothing for the present."

"But we must be ready," I firmly protested, sitting up. "This matter is in my hands and Christopher's now, not yours, my lad, for this is work that only men can plan and do."

The timidity in her look was new, but not less charming than her surrender.

"What are you going to do, Choseph?" she inquired with a mocking exaggeration of a helpless reliance that was quite genuine.

"We shall be ready to take Mr. Vancouver by stealth or force the moment that actual danger comes near him. We will bring him to this hut and hide him here. But a man from the colony will be needed to guard him. I am going immediately to bring one out for that purpose."

Her eyes kindled with alarm. "No, no, Choseph! That would be impossible. You couldn't find the way nor pass the guard. I will go." Argument and persuasion were equally useless; she knew when to be firm. "I will go," was her answer to everything, and she came to her feet. "You and Christopher come with me to the summit of the wall, and there you'll hide near the guard, and wait. I'll bring the man nearly to the place and send him ahead, and give you a signal. You must trick the guard out of the way, and meet him; I will follow. It would ruin everything for me to be seen."

I agreed, and told her to bring Hobart.

"Beelo," I said, "you understand that we have accomplished one of the tasks for which you brought us out of the valley, and in doing so have learned the fate awaiting our colony."

Her face at once grew pinched. "Don't speak of it, Choseph!" she cried. "I don't know whether you have or not, and I don't know what is in your mind. Simply think of saving Mr. Vancouver."

"Of course, dear lad," I agreed; "but we must be planning also for means to leave the island, since only something awful awaits us here. You must tell me all that I should know. I won't dance any longer to your mysteries and concealments."

It was as though I had struck her. She stared, her eyes flooding, her lips trembling.

"Choseph," she answered, "there are things that you must see and hear for yourself, and they will come tonight and tomorrow. I'll take you——"

"I must know now," I demanded, not realizing the harshness of my tone.

"Choseph, I——"

"Did you speak to me, sir?" came from Christopher, standing behind her.

"No, Christopher. We'll wait, dear little brother."

The sunshine came swimming into her eyes again, and she made a grimace of triumph in which was an understanding that Christopher had disciplined me.

"You'll be good now, won't you, Choseph?" It was said in her most teasing manner, and I smiled.

We started under an angry sky through which heavy cloud-masses tumbled. It was a cautious journey. The very air seemed filled with expectancy. On the way we formulated a plan for tricking the guard.

In approaching the point of egress from the valley, Beela practiced the slyness of a lynx and the silence of a serpent. Every step was studied lest a twig snap; the leaves on the ground had been softened by the rain. Presently we sighted the guard — a draggled lot, unused to exposure and dispirited by the weather. There Beela left us in hiding. I now understood the perils that she had breasted in every trip to the valley. If they were so difficult under these conditions, how much more they must have been when fair weather made the guard alert and the ground noisy under foot!

Beela was to warn us of Hobart's coming by giving a certain bird-call thrice. Christopher's answering signal would be notice to Beela that Hobart was safe.

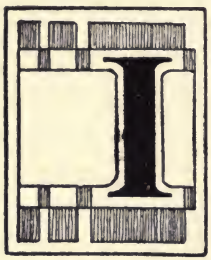
The savages, not twenty paces away — at least two dozen stalwart men — were variously squatting, sitting, and lounging. They were in a compact group, and were talking in low voices, but with an animation unusual to the race. I motioned Christopher to follow, and we crept nearer.

Some important news had just been brought by the relief guard.

"And so the king isn't going to wait for night," said one, as though the news was surprising.

"That is true," came the answer. "He fears that the ground will shake at any time. Besides, the storm will likely come again tonight, and the great fire would be impossible then."

Chapter XV. *The Lash in Unwilling Hands.* How We Outwitted the Guard. A Sword Encounter With a Native. Rawley Gives Me a Sensational Surprise. The Tragedy to Mr. Vancouver Delayed.



I Was absorbed in conjuring up plans for Mr. Vancouver's rescue; but the more I thought of it, the madder the undertaking seemed. Suppose we should take him; would not the whole island swarm in a search?

I had calculated that Beela and Hobart should come in four hours. More than half that time was already gone when Christopher and I returned to our original hiding-place. That the storm, the Black Face, and Mr. Vancouver's fate were interwoven, there could be no doubt. Barring hindering contingencies, matters were rapidly drawing to a crisis. If the necessity for urgent action on Mr. Vancouver's account should arise before Beela's return with Hobart, that young man would be caught in a trap, as there would be none but savages to meet him. In whatsoever direction I turned, many chances for a fatal slip and added complications appeared.

A solution of one branch of the problem crept out of the strain,— that of clearing the way for Hobart. I mentioned it to Christopher, and was gratified at his acquiescence.

"But what about Mr. Vancouver?" I asked.

"We *have* to wait for *her*, sir," he answered after listening, and his manner was final.

The triple bird-note came. We waited. It was repeated. I slipped round to the trail used by the guard, and openly approached them. They stared at me in silence. Beela had told me that in an emergency Christopher and I, to explain peculiarities of our appearance that no disguise could conceal, should explain that we were from the western end of the island, where some white blood had mingled with the native, producing, with other deviations from the normal type, men of a more aggressive and daring disposition, which gave them an advantage over the natives at this end, and that on occasion the king called on the western men for special services.

"Why haven't you done your duty?" I sternly demanded.

The guard showed only dull surprise, none either moving or speaking.

"Haven't you seen the Black Face scowling?" I went on. "Go immediately and attend to your duty, or the Face won't wait for a white man."

They were impressed and frightened. "What shall we do?" asked one.

"Clean the stone in the clearing, and so make it ready. Every one of you go, at once. Then come back here."

They looked from one to another, bewildered, the order evidently being extraordinary. "And leave the pass unguarded?" the same one inquired.

"Am I not here? Go immediately!"

"Did Gato send you?" asked a big fellow, advancing, sword in hand. His weapon was held threateningly, and scraped the bushes as he came.

Not daring to take any chances with him, and not

having had sufficient experience with these people to interpret their motive from their conduct, I sprang past him before he could raise his weapon, snatched a sword from an astonished native, backed away to keep the crowd before me until I had faced the one who had advanced upon me, and went at him with a determination that opened his eyes and instinctively brought his sword to guard. I discovered that the sword which I held was a heavy affair, broad and very old-fashioned. Before my inexpert antagonist knew what had happened, my sword had twisted his from his grasp and sent it flying into the bushes, and my point was at his breast. There was an excited movement in the crowd, but before anything could be done I loudly said to my captive:

"I have a good mind to kill you. Take your squad to the clearing at once."

"Yes," he hastily agreed, staring at me in wonder, and added, as his interest overcame his panic, "Are they coming with him soon?"

"That is neither your affair nor mine. If you don't go instantly I'll arrest the entire squad and take you all to the palace."

They obediently marched away.

In returning to Christopher I made a detour, so as to pass the spot where Hobart was to appear. I had instructed Christopher to remain a short distance away, as it would be easier for one to meet Hobart than two. My real reason, which I did not mention to Christopher, was that as a native his appearance was one of singular ferocity. I did not wish to run the risk of shocking Hobart out of his self-command.

To my astonishment, Rawley, not Hobart, rose

above the edge of the bluff. Perhaps my angry exasperation showed in my manner, for Rawley, after a startled glance, and seeing me alone, sprang upon me in the moment of my hesitation. His leap was swift and stirring, but I avoided him, and began to speak in a low voice. It had no effect. Rawley sprang again. I caught the violent thrust of his body, and an elbow better trained than he had expected took him in the throat, crashed his teeth together jarringly, and sent him reeling and strangling.

I again spoke, but he was too dazed to hear, and came at me again, more warily, with the glare of killing in his eyes, and still not heeding my pacific words. The natural grace with which he began to work for an opening gave his feline ease a threat that set me tingling. He was desperately in earnest, and my windpipe was his objective. There was no falter in his play, which I critically observed as I stood on the defensive. And then it came to me that this was neither the madness of fear nor the desperation of the cornered coward, but the awakening of that ultimate manhood in him which for so long had been held down by an artificial life. Even had he not forced me to silence, the game was so fine and exciting that I should have been tempted to cease my efforts to explain in my desire to see it through.

As his leaps were astonishingly clever and he might land at any moment, I began to crowd him. While moving to do so, I heard Christopher's signal to Beela, but did not pause to see where he was; Rawley also must have heard it, for something spurred his activities. In order to save Beela from the trap in which he supposed himself to have fallen, he must finish me at once.

I dodged his next spring, but his fingers scraped my throat. Then he found himself crushed in my arms. The short blows which he sent into my ribs had no effect, but they were delivered with a will. Beela rose above the summit, and understood all at a glance.

But, Beela-like, she saw only that it was ridiculous. Without taking the trouble to enlighten Rawley, who desisted as soon as he saw her laughing, she passed from surprise into unrestrained mirth. Rawley, standing away from me, stared at her in astonishment.

Seeing no sign of Hobart, I sharply inquired in the native tongue where he was.

"Captain Mason sent this one instead," she answered after finding her breath.

I was aghast. "What reason did he give?"

"None, Choseph. He thought you would understand, I suppose."

The blunder was incredible. Here were Mr. Vancouver and Rawley, the arch-enemies of the colony, sent out armed with fresh opportunity for destroying us, and we charged with the safety of their lives! The game had been sufficiently difficult and dangerous without that. I bitterly resented Captain Mason's course. He was aware of the antagonism between Rawley and me.

"Why did Captain Mason send him?" I demanded.

"He begged to come, Choseph."

That staggered me. What had happened to the man to change him so? "What did he say?" I asked.

"I don't know. He said little, although he was very much in earnest. On the way he said to himself several times, 'She called me a coward. They all think I'm a coward.'"

Christopher had come up and was standing placidly

by. Of a sudden Rawley recognized me as the savage who had visited Mr. Vancouver in the camp. He was composed, but had not yet discovered my real identity. A word from Beela disclosed Christopher and me to him. It broke in a crash on the young man. What reflections were belaboring him I could only guess from the shame crimsoning his face. I took his hand.

"Mr. Rawley," I said, "I am sorry that this has happened between us."

I interrupted something that he was trying to stammer by telling Beela how I had disposed of the guard. "They'll soon return," I added. "We must leave."

"Yes, but we must find out first whether they discovered the loss of the wood. Several hours would be required to bring up fresh fuel. Don't you think it's very interesting, Choseph? My! how solemn you look!"

Her careless insolence tried me, for the peril was great.

"It's a pity you never had any one to teach you to be serious," I let fly.

"That would be the funniest thing of all," she returned, amused. "Would you like to try it?"

Her sweet archness made me take a half angry, half possessing step forward, but a look stopped me.

"They are coming!" said she, and we hid.

The savages were more animated than before, and they wondered among themselves when the white man would be brought up from the settlement, and whether all or any of themselves would be relieved from guard duty, that they might witness the proceedings. It was clear that they had not missed the wood.

We slipped away. When we had come near our hut, Beela asked us to wait while she took Rawley to that hiding-place.

"Beelo," I firmly said, "you don't understand. That man and I cannot live together."

She regarded me with a suspicious-looking sadness.

"Enemies among yourselves, Choseph! Is this the best that wise men with so much at stake can do?"

With a smile I took her hand. "Thank you, dear little brother," I said. "I will do my part."

Tears easily came to Beela's eyes, and made them moist now.

"But you and Christopher are not to stay here any longer. Wouldn't you like to be nearer the beautiful, the good, the angel Lentala?"

"Explain, lad."

"Wait till I come back."

She darted to the hut with Rawley, and soon returned.

"The first thing," she said, "is to find out the plans for Mr. Vancouver. Although the wood is gone, the king won't be balked, and the getting of more wood will be but a matter of hours. When we discover that the preparations are really afoot, Mr. Vancouver must be taken by you. Before that, there is plenty to do."

We struck out for the slope overlooking the main settlement, and on the way passed near the hut where Mr. Vancouver was held. Beela disappeared within and soon returned with the news that the threatening weather was holding everything in abeyance.

Avoiding roads, we breasted the verdured heights and worked round the suburbs. As we mounted, the view expanded. The settlement, embowered among

trees, made the fairest picture I had ever beheld. I longed to see it under the mellow sunshine, which would make its colors more vivid; but even without that, the scene was satisfying. It was a considerable city, which had grown more by natural accretion than by plan. Broad, tree-lined highways with curves instead of right lines swept lengthwise through it. Many houses were of stone roughly laid up, and with roofs of mud or thatch. Remarkable effects had been secured by use of the native stone in its color variations. Of exceeding beauty was a pleasant stream which loitered through the settlement.

Most conspicuous was the palace of the king, with its accessory buildings and walled grounds. Unlike all the other houses, the palace was two stories in height, was of great size, and sat in generous grounds enclosed with a massive stone wall. I discovered Lentala's quarters; they were in a wing. Hamlets with adjoining farms dotted the farther slope and stretched up the valley; there were still more, said Beela, in other parts of the island.

With our further climbing, the ocean rose on the horizon, and a modern sea-going vessel sprang up inshore in a harbor at the foot of the settlement. My heart leaped as I studied her.

"What ship is that, Beelo?" I exclaimed.

"Yours, Choseph," she answered with a bright smile. "I was waiting for you to find it. That is what is to take your people home if a great earthquake comes and we can bring them out of the valley. The king wanted to destroy it, but Lentala persuaded him not only to save it, but to put it in order, as he might need it some time."

That she had reserved this precious information for so dramatic a use did not impress me at the time. Not till now did I realize that her purely feminine instinct for the theatrical made so large a figure in her withholdings and revelations.

My throat filled. I seized Christopher's arm and tried to speak, but no words issued, and I found that he was already gazing seaward. I had never seen in his eyes such wistfulness, so far and deep a vision, as when he raised them to mine.

From him I turned to Beela, and found a look of neglect and expectancy.

"Dear little brother," I said, and extended my hand; but she pouted, and put her arms behind her.

"I am not your dear little brother," she said, her lip trembling. "I am a savage. You gave your first joy to one of your race." The pain in her face was deep.

"Forgive me, lad." I was very humble, but her swimming eyes were turned away, and there was a swelling in her throat. What could I say? how make her understand? "Beelo, I——"

"It can't be explained," she interrupted, turning sadly away; and we went on in silence.

All at once, without any visible cause, she was her sunny, mischievous self again. I was exceedingly anxious for information,—what had become of the *Hope's* salvable cargo; whether her seizure by us was part of the plan to which we were working. But I had not the courage to mention the vessel again, lest pain come to Beela's face. Ever since her return from the valley I had been anxious for her report as to any plan of action that she had arranged with Captain

Mason, and I now conjectured that she had deferred it until we should see our vessel. With a blunder in tact I had closed her lips.

"Now," said she, "we'll return and keep an eye on Mr. Vancouver. Do you think you know the settlement now and could make your way in the night through it?"

"Perfectly," wondering at her impressiveness.

"And do you, Christopher?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Unmistakably she had a very intelligent purpose in thus making us acquainted with the topography of the settlement and the presence of our vessel. With that idea I began to make a closer study of the approaches and thoroughfares, although I could form no conception of means whereby the colony might use them against the overwhelming horde of armed natives. But Beela's comely head was packed with shrewdness.

The weather became more threatening with the approach of evening. At night, Beela left us concealed near the prison hut, and went to bring our supper.

After she had returned and we had eaten, she suggested that Christopher and I go and see the prisoner, and learn all that we could. Gato would not be on duty, and the light was dim. Thence we should go to the postern in the palace wall, and there be met by her. Then she left.

When we were near the hut a shadow leaped out of the ground, and challenged. I answered as Beela had instructed, and the guard stepped aside. We entered, and the two natives sitting with the prisoner gave us only a glance. In an authoritative manner I bade them wait outside, and they obediently went.

Mr. Vancouver was sitting on a stool, his head bowed in dejection, but he quickly straightened, and drilled us with a keenly questioning look, in which fear, anxiety, and hope were present. It was evident that he was profoundly suspicious. He was too shrewd not to see the significance of his being kept under guard in a hovel instead of being the king's guest.

I asked him in Senatra English if he was comfortable. Over his haggard face flashed an eager interest.

"That is nothing," he impatiently answered. I want to know why I am kept here."

"Do you really expect to see the king?" I asked.

He started. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"What do you think you are here for?"

"The king sent for me—for a conference." A red light came into his eyes.

"A conference. Suppose he has made up his mind that he can dispose of the white people without your help, and that you happen to be first."

The sallowness that already had entered his face since his imprisonment became livid, and the red light flared.

"To be sent away?" he thickly asked.

"Yes. Sent away. That is as good a name for it as any other."

I had ignored Christopher's gentle tug at my sleeve. A quiver ran through Mr. Vancouver as if a knife had been slipped between his ribs. It was with difficulty that he found breath for speech.

"Doesn't the king know that I can make him incredibly rich from his gold and silver and diamond mines? Doesn't he understand that——"

"Perhaps he is as rich as he cares to be. Besides, he

has never trusted a white man; and why should he trust one that betrays his own friends?" I could not avoid giving him that thrust.

He came weakly to his feet, terror and despair in every line.

"Did the king send you to say this?" he gasped.

I made no answer. The man sent a wild glance about as though to measure his strength with his prison, and to end all doubts quickly by any means. Then I saw that his wits were gone, and that the purpose of my talk, which was to prepare him for the revelation I had come to make, that he might be on his guard, had miscarried.

Christopher, in the background, edged round, keeping his back, as I kept mine, to the feeble light. I could not imagine that Mr. Vancouver, desperate though he was, would seize this moment to try issues with his fate; but I had not guessed soon enough that the red light meant madness. With a choking curse he snatched up his heavy stool and sprang with it upraised in both hands to crush me.

Before his leap was ended, a heavy body crashed into him, and two giant arms were cracking his joints and sending the stool flying over my head. The two guards came running in, but I sent them back. Christopher needed no aid.

The pinioned man rolled his head and eyes horribly, and cursed through foaming lips. He made futile efforts to sink his teeth into Christopher; he kicked wildly; he squirmed like an animal under a strangling hand. But Christopher's arms knew the mercy of strength, and he kept dropping soothing words. Like a pillar sunk deep in the earth stood Christopher while

his prisoner gasped curses and put fierce energy into every muscle.

"I know you!" he sputtered at me. "You are the infernal native dog that fooled me and trifled with me in camp. Let me at his throat, you baboon!"—to Christopher. "Loose me! Let me die with my arms free!" He called the king and me and all the natives unspeakable names. "In decency and mercy," he fumed, "kill me at once! I know now what you are going to do with me,—you cannibals!"

Christopher's quieting tongue was as persistent as his arms, and under them Mr. Vancouver was gradually breaking down. Christopher assured the wretch that no harm would befall him. The man who could resist such persuasion would be less than human and worse than mad. Mr. Vancouver's curses straggled off, his struggles ceased, and the red flame died in his eyes. Christopher had coaxed reason back.

He seated Mr. Vancouver, bathed his face, and gave him water to drink. With a gentle touch he unlaced and removed the sufferer's shoes, and undressed him. The man had become a child in Christopher's hands, and was wholly docile when made comfortable in bed.

There had been no personal heed of Christopher in Mr. Vancouver's yielding; but it evidently occurred to him at last that here was something strangely different from the manner of the natives—something nearer and humanly akin. He had been studying Christopher; and when he was composed, and Christopher was turning away, Mr. Vancouver seized his arm and held him, looking earnestly into his face, and then covering his figure with a startled glance. His eyes opened with astonishment.

"Who are you?" he demanded under his breath.

"You know, sir."

"Christopher!"

"Yes, sir. Speak low."

"What are you doing here, disguised like that?"

"Captain Mason sent us, sir."

"What for?"

"To save you, sir. Don't talk."

Mr. Vancouver breathed laboredly, and the veins in his forehead bulged.

"Who was sent with you?" he faintly asked.

"Him, sir," indicating me.

I saw the knot come in the suffering man's throat as he rolled his bloodshot eyes upon me, half raised himself on his elbow, and stared while his breathing rasped.

"Who is he?" came chokingly, with a clutch on Christopher's arm.

"Mr. Tudor, sir."

A spasm caught Mr. Vancouver in the chest, and a rigor ran through him. His eyes closed, his head swung back, his mouth fell open, and Christopher eased the insensible man down on the pillow.

Chapter XVI. *A Light in the Gloom.* Subtle Changes in Beela. A Startling Discovery in the Palace Vaults. The Secrets of the Council Chamber Overheard. Urgent Measures Planned.

OU ARE late!" blithely greeted Beela when we arrived at the palace gate after leaving Mr. Vancouver. "That shows how much you think of the beautiful, the angel, the sweet, the good Lentala, for you are to sleep in her quarters tonight."

We were just in time, for the heavens were opening, and the deluge was at hand.

With great caution Beela conducted us to a chamber in Lentala's wing of the palace. Evidently it was a sanctuary, for it was quite different from the room in which Lentala had received us, and Beela carelessly remarked that in giving us the room, her sister was bestowing a special favor, since not even her servants were ever admitted.

"Because," Beela chattered on as she lighted the beautiful lamps, "this is where she comes to lead alone the life that she dreams about, far, far away, where there are no Senatras,— the life that was born in our blood, Choseph, and that we can see very dimly, and in our dreams only. But this room helps Lentala to dream of it. Do you remember the story you told me one day? She has changed the room tonight merely by bringing in these couches for you and Christopher to sleep on."

I felt something new in Beela's manner,— a note of sentiment singing low in her voice, an augmented softness and grace in her bearing. She appeared to be struggling against it and striving to be the boy Beelo. Some success came, but the winning note still sang in her throat.

She opened an adjoining room, and disclosed a bath.

"Your Senatra tint is a little damaged," she cheerily said. "Wash it off; you'll not need it tonight. Here's a fresh supply for tomorrow morning. Don't forget to put it on! But there's much to do before you sleep. I am going to take you to the Council Chamber. Dress as quickly as possible. I have to make some changes myself. When you are ready, give three light taps on that door."

"Thank you, dear little brother, but where's Lentala?"

"Lentala! Do you think she can sit up all night waiting for callers?"

"We are to see her in the morning, then?"

Beela had been bustling over finishing touches for our comfort, but my question — perhaps my tone — stopped her.

"Do you wish to see her?" she asked.

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Beelo! Can you ask that? Unless we see Lentala whenever we come to the palace, the jungle is more comfortable."

She turned away, pretending to be hurt.

"And so you don't care for Beelo. It is nothing to sleep under the same roof with him."

"But Beelo is a part of my life, dear lad. How-

ever far away he may be, he is always with me. Whenever and wherever I go, my dear little brother's hand is in mine; and no matter when or where I sleep, his sweet breath is on my cheek; and the touch of his light fingers on my lids and the ring of his cheery laugh in my heart wake me in the morning. In my dreams——" I paused, for Beela embarrassed me by the breathless interest with which she was listening.

"In your dreams, Choseph?"

"Then Beelo comes with another. He leads that one by the hand, and smiles at me, and says in his musical voice, 'This one also you must like, big brother, for this is Beelo's best friend.'"

She came close and looked up into my eyes.

"That other one, big brother?"

"Is Lentala."

Her breath caught as she moved away, and she was silent for a little while as she gave the last touches and started to leave. At the door she threw me a mischievous glance, and said:

"You have funny dreams, Choseph, but I'll tell Lentala you wish to see her," and was gone.

I had already observed that no touch of native savagery rested on this room. Every article of use or adornment was of a highly civilized production. The barbaric splendor of the reception-room was absent here, and a dainty, girlish simplicity was the note. Exceedingly charming were products of her needlework and other handicraft copied from foreign articles. There were some English books that showed signs of hard use. I picked up one and found a dainty handkerchief within it, and felt a pity for Lentala thus reaching out for what she could not understand.

Beela appeared in different clothes when I rapped, and was much fresher and smarter than I had ever seen her. She looked conscious under my admiring glance, and expressed gratification at the improvement in my looks.

"Beelo, you are as pretty as a girl. Fie!"

She pretended not to hear, and was busy lighting a lantern.

"They are all asleep in this wing," she said. "Now we'll go. Listen to the storm! Mr. Vancouver is safe for another day, I hope. And still no earthquake."

I felt a twinge, but no opportunity had offered for my telling her of the incident in the hut. The truth is, I dreaded lest she find fault with Christopher for disclosing our identity to Mr. Vancouver and my knowledge of his perfidy.

It would be difficult to say in what lay the finer air of Beela's dress. In cut the garments had a masculine approach, but in China they might have passed for feminine. The trousers and blouse were of fine dark-blue cloth, and were ample. In place of the somewhat shabby straw hat was a becoming red turban, and the shoes were Turkish, red, and richly embroidered in gold. The blouse opened like a V at the neck, and a negligée tie matching in shade the turban and the shoes was secured with a splendid diamond at the bottom of the V.

More insinuating than these outward things were the girl's gentler voice and manner. There was a hint of the young mother in her caressing look and touch, and the cello note in her voice had fallen still softer and smoother.

In lighting the lantern, she disarranged her turban

by striking it against a piece of furniture. She straightened, and raised her arms to readjust it. Her sleeves were wide and open, and they slipped down, baring her arms.

I had been trying with all my might to keep from my mind the delicious thought of Beelo's metamorphosis, but self-deception was no longer possible. I *must* revel in this new and pleasant experience. The one duty that I must observe was the keeping of my promise to Lentala that I would not let her little sister know that I knew.

"Are we ready?" cheerily asked Beela, picking up the lantern and darkening it with a cloth. "Come. No talking till I give you leave. We must be careful in this wing, for Lentala's servants might wake. The noises of the storm will help us, but the veranda is drenched. We must take the other way."

She opened the door through which she had entered last, and we were in darkness when she closed it; but I had dimly seen that it was a corridor.

"We can't use the lantern yet," she whispered, slipping her hand down my sleeve to my fingers. "Can you find your way, Christopher?"

"Yes." There was always something tragic in Christopher's whisper.

"Do you love me, Christopher?" she teasingly asked, squeezing my fingers.

"Yes, ma'am."

It required great stoicism for me to hold my hand passive and not return the pressure, but I was amazed when she abruptly dropped my fingers. I could see nothing except a faint glow through the cloth about the lantern, but I peremptorily seized her sleeve, drew

her arm up, took her hand, and squeezed it hard, for reproof. She made no resistance. Beela was very sweet in the dark,— I remembered the passage through the mountain.

We almost immediately turned into a much longer stretch, as I knew by the whispering echoes of our steps; and soon the shrouded light of Beela's lantern made the walls visible. After leading us down a dark stair she halted before a door, unlocked it, ushered us within, relocked the door, and removed the cloth from the light.

This chamber was a disordered lumber-room, filled with odds and ends of broken things, native and foreign. I was less interested in the rubbish than in the new picture of Beela in the ascending light from the lantern. It made a witchery of her chin, emphasized the graceful curve of her lips, filled her delicate nostrils, and threw her eyes into mystical shadow. I tried to get her hand again, but failed. Beela in the light was not the same as Beela in the dark.

She paused, and breathed more freely.

"We are safe for a while now," she said. It was hard to listen composedly to her words, so sweet was the tone of them.

She wound and twisted through the stores, we following, and brought up at a door which a stranger, likely, never would have found. This she unlocked, passed us through, and secured behind us. The air was dank and musty, and despite the lantern there were uncanny patches of phosphorescent light on walls otherwise invisible as yet. The space was roomy, the floor earthen. It proved to be a large cellar-like chamber with a low ceiling supported by stone pillars groined

into arches, and was paved, furnished with grated windows, and sweet and dry. Here were immense stores: American-tinned provisions in astonishing abundance; bale upon bale of cloth of many kinds; modern farming implements, and machinery and tools for sawyers, carpenters, cabinet-makers, upholsterers, and many other useful trades; and at one side an array of fire-arms and ammunition.

Beela was watching me in my astonishment, for not the smallest item of this store had I seen in use by the natives.

"Don't you know what it all is, Choseph?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"It is the cargo of your vessel."

I was speechless. Two things were clear: one, that the water-tight bulkheads in the *Hope* had not given way (which accounted for her pursuit of us instead of sinking), and the other, that the natives had carefully repaired all the water-damage possible. The thorough care of the cargo very likely had extended to the vessel herself.

My emotion was profound. I wrung Beela's hand, but something in my eyes made her dim and floating. Only vaguely could I see the sweet uplift and happiness in her face. Christopher was standing apart like a man of wood except that his eyes were living. If he needed any expression from me of the almost cruel joy that filled me, he gave no sign, but stood in the pathetic loneliness that forever invested him.

"We must go on," said Beela. "It is time for the king's privy council."

A devious way through another storage vault filled

with things no doubt of great value, the ascent of a stone stair, a turning into this passage and another into that, and a short flight of steps, brought us at last upon a curtained balcony overlooking a dimly lighted council hall of considerable size and rich in savage appointments. The king was on a throne facing us, and in a semi-circle before him, seated on rugs on the stone floor, were old and elderly native men splendidly appareled. The king was even more sumptuously robed than on the day of our reception by him. He had no personal attendants, for this, Beela explained in a whisper, was not a state council, but a secret one, called occasionally for extraordinary purposes, composed of selected wise men, and generally held late at night. The balcony where we sat was for the use of the queen and her feminine friends at state meetings. The diaphanous curtains, of an exquisite native texture and handsomely embroidered, could be seen through from our side, which was in shadow, but not from the other.

One thing had been puzzling me exceedingly. It was that no American and European articles looted from wrecks were in use in their original form by any of the natives except Lentala and Beela.

"Because," Beela had told me in answer to my question, "the natives don't need them, and are more content without them. The king is wise with his people, and they love him."

The council was under way. An old man had been droning something that I did not hear, for his voice was weak and the storm noisy. The king nodded to another, a younger man, who came to his splendid full height. His gold-embroidered cloak of office slipped

from his great right shoulder and arm after he had risen from his obeisance.

"What is the temper of the Senatras, Gato?" the king asked.

"Very impatient, Sire. There are murmurings and small secret gatherings. Rebellion is in the air."

The king moved uneasily. "And your soldiers?" he inquired.

"I have them in hand as yet, but they are naturally affected by the restlessness among the people, and are sick of waiting and of guarding the passes. They have never been on duty so long. They love their homes and farms, and they can't understand the delay. If a wreck should come with this storm, where will the people from it be held?"

"There is plenty of room in the valley," snapped the king, making an impatient gesture. "And don't our people know that the crowd we have there is different from any castaways we have had before? Of course we can't let any of them leave the island, for they suspect its wealth, and would return with soldiers and guns, and destroy us. But we have to proceed cautiously. There are more than a hundred and fifty picked men in the party, and their leaders, Mason and Tudor, and the giant ape Christopher, are shrewd, bold men, and have no fear."

We three were sitting close together, Beela in the middle. One of her hands stole out, took Christopher's, squeezed it, and released it. The other found my hand; I closed on its warm softness and kept it prisoned.

"In some mysterious way," Gato explained, "they have outwitted us. Our plan was to break them up

by using the old traitor Vancouver, but they evidently discovered his treachery, and I have just learned that they sent him out as our first offering to the Black Face, while letting him think that he was going to betray them to us."

"I suppose," said the king, "that he is as good as another for the sacrifice. That will satisfy the people for a time, but he is the first and the last that we'll get from that crowd without bloody work, and I don't wish my subjects to be killed."

He paused, and the others waited. Beela's breathing had grown quick; there was a slight quiver in her hand.

The king went on:

"Mason evidently suspects that the people taken out of the valley will not be sent away, and so he is holding them together. No doubt they have armed themselves, and are ready to fight. Mason will be in no hurry to precipitate an issue with us, for they can subsist indefinitely where they are, we can't strengthen our position against them, and time, he reasons, may bring me to liberate them in a body."

It was impossible not to recognize the kindliness and benevolence in the king's voice and words.

"May I speak, Sire?"

"Yes, Gato."

"I fear that Vancouver is going mad."

The king looked his dismay.

"He mumbles," proceeded Gato; "his eyes are wild at times; he calls for his daughter, and weeps like a child; he cannot eat, and his sleep is broken with loud cries."

"Is there much of that?" the king asked in alarm.

"No, Sire; only rarely. If he is taken to the sacrificial altar when he has a lucid period,——"

"The risk is great," groaned the king. "The people would resent the offering up of a madman; and we can do nothing while the storm lasts. The people can't assemble. We must wait. You men go among the Senatras tomorrow and pacify them. Tell them that all will be well. Do they say that the Face is threatening, Gato?"

"Yes, Sire. Some fools have seen it and spread tales about it. One is that green water streams out of its eyes, and another is that the mouth has opened and that purple flames come forth."

Beela's start thrilled me. The news brought the king to his feet.

"Is it true, Gato,—the open mouth and the purple flame?"

"I do not know, Sire. I have not seen it, and I do not believe it."

"But it may be true! Find out tomorrow morning, and let me know." He was leaving the throne, and although the light was poor, I could see a totter in his step and haggardness in his face.

The others were rising. The king turned to them, and said:

"If *that* is true,——" He did not finish, but stood in a daze. "The council is ended," he weakly added, and slowly left the chamber, the others filing after him.

Chapter XVII. *Disciplined by a Woman.* Lentala's Odd Mistake. Beela Finds Me Refractory. The Deep-Laid Plan of Gato. Christopher and I Charged With Service to the Old King.

Sleep held away that night. The revelations of the privy council had been startling. Some things were clear. One was that the king was a shrewd, easy-going, kindly man, vastly wiser than his subjects, and finding it simpler to rule them by pampering their superstitions than by raising them to his own understanding. Another was that he felt himself on the edge of a crisis, saw no way to avert a possible catastrophe, and was facing it with a paralyzing dread.

Lentala, fresh and radiant, brought our breakfast. Except for her color, not a trace of savagery remained about her. Her dress was a simple house-frock of fine white linen, and of a modern style. Her hair was done exactly like Annabel's.

It did not improve her appearance. Had she been white, there would have been no touch of the incongruous. But in this fresh, sweet daintiness, much of her savage splendor had been sunk, and I felt a keen disappointment. The former Lentala, for all her barbarity, had never seemed an alien, but more a bringing back to me of a deeply rooted principle fundamental in my heritage.

She appeared to expect a compliment; but how could I be otherwise than sincere with her? Our greetings

were pleasant; yet her clothes had set a constraint between us.

"You don't like my dress, Mr. Tudor?" she ruefully asked.

"It is exquisite, Lentala, and——"

"I made it all myself, from a picture in a book out of your ship! I thought you would like it. Doesn't Annabel dress this way?"

"Yes; but in the native dress your beautiful, rich color——" I paused in my floundering for a delicate way in which to say it. "Annabel is white, you know," I blundered.

Foreseeing my explanation, she had turned flutteringly away before my final words came, and was still holding the empty copper tray on which she had brought our breakfast. It fell with a clatter; her back was turned to me when she picked it up in confusion.

"A white woman!" She did not look at me. "Yes, she can wear dainty things and be sweet; but a brown savage woman——"

I had risen from my seat at the table and was advancing toward her. She turned and faced me defiantly, backing away, her eyes flashing. In another second, with a lightning change which showed her near kinship with Beela, she smiled sweetly, and asked with a dash of her old coquetry:

"Would you like Lentala better if she were white and pink like Annabel?"

"How could I like Lentala white more than Lentala brown, since, first and last, it is Lentala that I like?"

She frowned comically in an effort to puzzle some sense out of that speech.

"I mean," I added, laughing at her perplexity, "that I like Lentala because she is Lentala, not because she isn't some one else."

That was another poser, and she made just such a little wry face over it as I had seen Beela make many a time. Her face brightened as she made a dash at a short cut out:

"Do you like me *because* I'm brown?"

"That is a question! It isn't because you aren't white that I like you."

"*Could* you like me if I were white?" She stamped impatiently.

"I'd try to," I sighed.

She made a little pout, stuck up her chin, turned stiffly, and went out with great dignity. It was the Lentala of the feast!

Beela entered when we had finished breakfast. In her rough clothes and tightly bound hair, she made so sharp a contrast to Lentala that, for a moment, I could not think of her as a girl, but as the dear lad whom I had lost. She had none of her brilliant sparkle now, and my heart ached to see the weariness and anxiety that she tried so bravely to conceal.

"What's afoot for today, dear little brother?" I cheerily inquired.

She was regarding me solemnly. "You've had your wish, I suppose. You've seen Lentala this morning."

"Yes. She brought our breakfast. She's an angel."

"Pooh!" Beela was bored. "I've seen her. She looked a fright in those clothes. Trying to ape Annabel! She ought to have better sense. I know you were disgusted."

"Beelo!"

"Don't talk! I know."

"You are tired and cross this morning, lad."

She flopped into a chair, very glum. "Women are *such* fools!" she grumbled.

"Now I am grieved to learn that Lentala is not a woman, for she could never be a fool."

Beela looked at me with sad reproach, and shook her head.

"Just now," I went on, "she was a rich red rose sparkling with morning dew. Her smile started all the birds to singing. She——"

"Choseph!" She stamped the floor, much as Lentala had done, but a smile fringed her frown. "You *know* she made a fright of herself trying to look like Annabel,—and with that ugly brown face!"

"No, no, Beelo. The only trouble was that Lentala is too modest to realize how spendidly perfect she is as Lentala."

"But wasn't she still Lentala in those silly clothes?"

"She was as much less Lentala as her effort to be something else succeeded in making her."

Beela looked puzzled exactly as Lentala had.

"But her heart is broken!" she cried. "She says that you laughed at her, and spoke in riddles!"

"I laughed *with* her, Beelo, not *at* her; and the riddles were a bit that I put in my mouth."

"Why?"

"The temptation to say beautiful things to Lentala that might sound insincere is strong."

She rose, with a confusion that was half amusement, and tried to hide the light in her eyes.

"Come, Choseph! There is much to do today."

"I must see Lentala first."

She could not mistake my seriousness. "Why?" in surprise.

"I won't have her unhappy over that trifling incident. She is too sensitive,—she misunderstood. I must see her, lad." I started for the door.

"Choseph!" came breathlessly. "Don't!"

I turned.

"Don't look at me that way!" she exclaimed in genuine alarm. Christopher was moving round toward the door for which I had started.

"What way?"

"As though—as though you'd break down doors and kill anybody that stood in your way!"

"I want to see Lentala."

"You can't! She—she's undressed. I'll tell her. She'll be satisfied."

"Will you, lad? Thank you."

She began making some preparations about the room. "You ought to be kept tied, Choseph," she said, half to herself. "I never know what you are going to do next." Yet a sweet note in her voice sounded low.

She came and stood before me, looking me straight in the eyes.

"I was going to give you and Christopher very delicate and important work to do this morning, Choseph, but I'm afraid you'll do something rash and ruin us all."

I felt the sting. "Trust me, little brother."

She shook her head in trouble. "You're not sly, Choseph; you're not cunning and patient. Those are what are needed now. You have enough courage."

"Trust me, lad."

"You are to meet King Rangan, Choseph, and you are to do everything that he wishes you to do. You may think you ought not."

"If you say that I ought, I will."

"I do say so. If you refuse, or show temper, or do anything that a Senatra wouldn't do, all is lost. Do you understand?"

"I am not a fool, Beelo."

"Choseph! That was temper."

"Trust me, lad," I begged.

"It is very dangerous work—terribly so if you make a mistake."

"There will be no mistake."

"The king is much broken. He is growing old, and the problem of the colony is wearing on him. Choseph, will you think of him as kind and gentle, and as meaning well?"

"Yes."

"And will you watch Christopher? Sometimes he understands more than you or I."

"I will."

"Very well." Beela was much relieved. "Now I'll explain. The king is failing rapidly. He needs such friends as you and Christopher, and ——"

"Such friends as *we*, when he is holding us as fattening cattle?"

"Choseph!" Beela's voice rang sharp, and she angrily stamped. Then came a hopeless look.

I took her hands. "Come, dear friend," I pleaded. "That was the last. I am wholly in your hands. And remember, there is always Christopher."

She turned away with a sigh, and began to put finishing touches to our efforts at the restoration of

neatness in the room. She was evidently gathering herself, for presently she came and took a seat facing me, Christopher standing. Her manner was serious.

"This is the case," she said: "The king has meant always to be kind to Lentala and me, and we are grateful. We love the queen dearly. We would lay down our lives before permitting any harm to befall them."

Her emotion made her pause.

"Serious dangers are threatening them now,—more than they suspect,—and these have come because of your people. Before that, only one or two would be cast up from the wrecks. They gave no trouble."

Horror came into her face, and she looked away.

"I always supposed that they were sent off," she resumed. "Never once did I suspect the truth until shortly before your party came, and then my affection for the king died in me, and I was sick at heart. I don't think the queen knows the truth to this day. I think the king would have stopped it long ago, but for Gato, who wanted to use it to keep the natives in savagery. He is a bad man, with great power. When your large party came, he saw a way to break the king, stir the people to rebellion, kill the king and queen, and take the throne himself."

"Does Gato suspect that you know this about him?" I asked in astonishment.

"No. There is where our safety lies. I never should have suspected him if he hadn't made love to Lentala and told her that if she would marry him she would soon be queen,—the beast! Then we watched and found out."

After a thoughtful pause she proceeded:

"Gato is secretly stirring up the people. I have no doubt that he is about ready to strike. His plan will be this, I think: The palace guard are men whom he can trust to do his work; he will kill everybody here, and then take the army into your valley and slaughter all but a few. He will keep those for the sacrifices. It was he that induced the king to use Mr. Vancouver as your traitor. But, unlike the king, he doesn't care how many natives might be killed in a fight with the colony when he has made himself king."

She was regarding me curiously.

"And what are Christopher and I to do?" I cheerfully asked.

"Let me tell you some things before that," she answered, but with hesitancy. "You won't be hurt with me, Choseph, and you won't be angry?"

"Assuredly not, dear lad."

"I told Captain Mason all these things when I went into the valley the last time." She waited anxiously.

"I am very glad of that," I brightly answered.

She was much relieved, and with a sudden dash came over and squeezed my hand.

"You are really my dear big brother!" she said, and demurely resumed her seat. "I told him something else," she went on with more confidence. "It was to have his entire colony ready to move at a moment's notice,—not to bring anything with them, except all the food they could carry, but to be prepared at any time of the day or night to march in perfect silence out of the valley."

"To the ship!" I exclaimed.

She smiled. "I advised him to pick some cool, trustworthy men to take charge of the march."

"He said——?"

"That he already had his men chosen, and was glad that Hobart didn't have to come out with me. He said it would be the making of Rawley to come, and that you would understand."

I did at last. There was something almost magical in Captain Mason's ability to dig the manhood out of men.

"And now for your work and Christopher's," resumed Beela. "I will take you to the king as English-speaking natives from the mountains beyond the valley on the west, which you have not seen. As I have told you, the natives there are wilder and fiercer than these, have little intercourse with them, and are largely independent. Their blood has mingled with that of a few castaways, and they are brighter. On this side is the ancient race, simple, gentle, dull. The king is proud of it, and wishes to keep it pure. But he will welcome the other men in this emergency, particularly if they speak English."

"Has he full confidence in Gato?" I inquired.

"I think he is growing suspicious."

"And we?"

"You are to be the king's confidential agents; to find out, independently of Gato, all that is afoot; to be ready to protect the king; and especially to treat with the colony if any trouble should rise from that source. Is it all clear?"

"Nearly. We are to guard the king and maintain his authority at any cost?"

Beela studied me uneasily. "Yes, at any cost," she slowly answered.

"I was thinking of Gato," I explained. "We are

to resort to any measures with him, however extreme, if we have good reason to think them necessary?"

"Yes," somewhat anxiously. "What do you mean, Choseph?"

"Anything that may be wise and prudent."

She glanced down. She made no reply, but gave this warning, still not looking up:

"Take no chances with him. When you strike, which you must, sooner or later, let the blow be swift and sure."

"What will become of the army when he is out of the way?"

The question troubled her. "It is very uncertain," she answered. "There may be leaders under him who are in his confidence. They or one of them may take command and lead the army against the palace."

She sprang to her feet and glanced about.

"Let's go to the king at once," she said. "Lentala told him about you and promised to have you there by this time. I fear that Gato has already returned with his report of the Face with its open mouth and purple flame."

"Just one thing, dear lad," I interrupted. "I wish to see Lentala first."

Her adaptability was as quick as a child's. The seriousness which she had worn flashed into a teasing quirk of the mouth.

"What for?"

"You know very well."

"Choseph," she said, solemnly wagging her head at me, "how can you think of girls at such a time as this? Lentala would have too much sense to see you now. Come with me to the king."

Chapter XVIII. *To the Rescue of the King.* Our Risky Audience With His Majesty. He Encoils Us in Allegiance. I Open His Eyes. Gato's Scheme of Regicide. A Bold Act by Christopher.

ON our way to the royal apartments, Beela again took us through the vaults. I used the opportunity to fix in my memory the exact places where the arms and ammunition from our vessel were kept. The king never permitted any of his subjects to handle firearms.

Hard by the vaults she showed us a dungeon. Not within her memory had it been occupied, and few, even in the palace, knew of its existence. It was an ingeniously designed prison, a grated window for ventilation and a little light being so placed that no sound could reach the outside; and the door was so deadened that no beating could make a noise.

Anxious that none of the king's attendants should see her, Beela gave us directions how to go and what to say and do if we were halted, and slipped away, informing us that we might see her face at a small curtained window high in the east wall of the room where the king would receive us.

One after another of the attendants whom we encountered on the way eyed us curiously and, I thought, suspiciously, and put their heads together after we had passed. One of them gave a low whistle; two came forward from in front, stopped us, and demanded our identity and business. All these men were armed.

"The king expects us," was my curt answer; but more effective was our cool assurance.

Thus we arrived at the door, which was open, a soldier on guard. More peremptorily than the others he demanded our names and errand.

"The king expects us," I repeated, and was going within; but the fellow laid a hand on me. I flung it off, and so confused him that we were within before he could interfere. He mustered some briskness to follow, but was too late, for the king had seen us.

I was shocked at his appearance in the clearer light of day. At the feast he had looked not far beyond his prime; his eyes were bright then, and he bore himself with a commanding dignity. Now he was sinking into decrepitude.

"I have been expecting these men," he said, and the guard withdrew; but I knew that he was slyly listening at the door.

We made an obeisance. I caught a glimpse of Beela's encouraging face at the window.

The king was lounging on a divan; he had been talking with two elderly men seated on rugs before him. They regarded us keenly as the king asked them to withdraw. When they had gone, Christopher closed and locked the door, and stood with his back to it. The surprised and curious scrutiny of the king was on him, passing down his grotesque figure. From Christopher he turned to me.

"What do you wish?" he inquired.

"To serve you, Sire."

"How?"

"Secretly, by finding out many things, by learning the truth; and in any other way."

"I have men for that."

"You have Lentala also, Sire. She knows that you need us, and that we will serve you intelligently, faithfully, and without fear."

"Without fear of whom?"

"Every one of account has enemies, Sire."

"Have I any? I want no guessing."

"We will find out."

"Does Lentala know?"

"Not positively, perhaps; but we all love her, and she has many ways of learning, since she is not hedged about and kept in the dark as your Majesty can be."

The king was brightening; a faint eagerness crept into his face.

"Where did you learn to talk in that way?"

"I don't understand your Majesty."

"That inflection. It isn't pure Senatra."

"It is my misfortune, Sire. A long time ago a white man, an American, escaped from the natives with the aid of a Senatra girl. She went with him into the lonely mountains back of the village Sumanali. There my brother," indicating Christopher, "and I were born. We speak our father's language as well as our mother's."

"English?"

"Yes, Sire."

"I meant something else, also, in your speech,—a quickness, a nimbleness."

"The white man was bright and keen, Sire."

"What is your name?" he asked me.

"Joseph, Sire."

"And his?"

"Christopher, Sire."

"Those are not Senatra names."

"Our father was an American, Sire."

He put me through a further shrewd examination, and I answered readily. It was having a slow but conspicuous effect in heartening him. I was evidently a new and refreshing element, perhaps bringing hope. He appeared satisfied, and asked:

"Have you any suspicions?"

"I have, your Majesty."

"Of what? and of whom?"

"Might it not be unjust, Sire, to express mere suspicions?"

He reflected a moment, and asked:

"Do you know Gato?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And the Black Face?"

"Very well."

"And the purple flame?"

"Yes. I saw it two days ago."

"Where?" asked he in excitement, sitting erect.

"It was slipping along the top of the valley wall, near the Face."

The king's perturbation increased, but he found no wavering of my eyes under his sharp gaze.

"More than that, Sire; my brother and I went into the river passage through the wall. We saw the red fire and barely missed a great explosion."

The king's astonishment brought him to his feet.

"Tell me more!" he demanded.

I gave him an account of all that we had seen and endured, including the flaming waterfall, the boiling cauldron, and the earthquake.

"You dared that passage!" he exclaimed, looking

from one to the other of us in amazement. "It was the white blood. Not another man in the kingdom would do it. Gato could not make any of his men go; yet I was anxious to know."

He was saying this partly to himself, as he aimlessly walked the floor.

"Why did you go?" he abruptly asked.

"We had heard that no one else was willing, and we wished to serve your Majesty."

The king's back being turned, I glanced up at the window. The curtain parted for a moment, and Beela's beaming face nodded and smiled.

"Yes," muttered the king in a profound disturbance, "it means that an upheaval is at hand,— and a crisis!" He came and stood before me, plumping this question at me: "Do you fear the Black Face, the flame, and the earthquake?"

"Not in the least, Sire," I smilingly answered.

"All the others do."

"Your Majesty has not forgotten that our father was white. He taught us many wise things."

He was smitten with a look that seemed to come from his conscience, and sank with a groan into the divan.

"Had I only been as true to my duty, and led my people to the light!" he exclaimed. "Lentala begged me to. Now I must pay, I must pay!"

I needed no recalling of my pledge to Beela, for pity held me. I looked to the window, and the radiance coming thence lighted my wits.

"There is always hope, Sire," I cheerfully said; "we can work and hope."

He gave me a haggard look. "You know," he said,

" the Senatras believe that unless sacrifices are made of the white people in the valley there will come no more wrecks and castaways, and that the Black Face will therefore send the terrible earthquake and eruptions which frighten our people into madness, sweep the island with fire, and destroy lives and farms. But how can a sacrifice be made? The people think that to offer up a madman would infuriate the Face and cause frightful disaster. It is impossible to bring another white man from the valley, because the colony would fight rather than give him up. Yet unless there is a sacrifice the Senatras will rebel through fear of the Face, the army will revolt, my palace will be seized, and the queen, Lentala and I, with all our friends and servants, will be put to the sword."

" A leader, who must be a traitor, would be required for that, your Majesty. That would mean a man of eminence among us; and not that alone, but one who has already laid his plans and is ready at this moment to strike."

The king was staring at me in terror.

" You speak with a deep understanding," he huskily said, " and you have more to tell me. Proceed."

" Yes, Sire. The white people wish only to leave the island, and to go in peace. They will do no harm if they are not opposed; if they are, they will harm only those who oppose them."

" How do you know?"

" I speak with knowledge from my white father."

" But if they are permitted to go, they will spread tales of great riches here, and destroying ships and armies will come."

" Permit me, Sire. In the first place, with such coad-

jutors as Lentala, my brother and I, you could make the island impregnable. That would be far wiser than the risk which you are now running, for the sea, even in my father's time, was filling with ships, and the great countries were hunting new possessions. At any time a ship may come without the aid of the storms. She would see this large and beautiful island, and, though driven off, would inform her own country, which would send vessels and men to overwhelm us."

"Yes, yes. But would it be possible for us to prepare defenses?"

"It is our duty to do all that we can, Sire. But there can be an additional protection. So long as we keep our present backwardness we shall be deemed the rightful prey of any nation. If we aim to be more like the great countries, and send ambassadors to them and make treaties with them, they will protect us against one another."

This mightily impressed the king.

"That sounds reasonable," he said with a pitiful air of wisdom, "but it may be attended to hereafter. We are facing a present crisis. You said that a leader of an insurrection would be required."

"Yes, Sire."

"The army could put down any trouble."

"With the army itself in revolt?"

"But Gato's control of the army is powerful."

"Yet it is on the edge of revolt. If Gato is all-powerful with his men, and in spite of that fact says he can't control them,—— But your Majesty is abler than I to draw inferences."

The king came nervously to his feet.

"It is easy to understand, Sire," I went on, "that

an ambitious and unscrupulous man would see his opportunity when the people are paralyzed with fear of the Face or with an outburst of its wrath."

"Opportunity for what?" the king demanded.

"What would he want, Sire? Your throne would be a temptation, and so would Lentala to a man who wanted a beautiful wife."

The king gripped the edge of a table.

"He asked me for her," the wretched man growled like a lion gnawing a bone. "I refused him. She is very dear to me. I wanted her to have a better man, of her own choosing. For I have provided that she is to rule my people when I am gone."

Though greatly surprised, I refrained from looking toward the window, and kept silence while the broken man fought out his agony. When the urgency of his situation had measurably restored him, he began to pace the floor, and asked:

"Something has to be done immediately. What would you suggest?"

"What does your Majesty understand the case to be?"

"We are on the eve of a revolution. The task is to check it."

"Meanwhile, Sire, I observe that a score of Gato's soldiers are in the palace. Is that customary?"

The king stopped and turned a livid look on me.

"No. Gato suggested that it would be safer to have them here for the present as a protection."

"Protection for whom, Sire?"

The hint in the question swept the breath out of him, and he stood staring.

"I hadn't suspected ——" he struggled for breath to begin. Then, "I see, I see."

The imminence of danger electrified his dormant forces. He hardened and expanded, and fighting blood began to run in his veins. I said:

"There is one thing more, your Majesty. The white people in the valley are able, daring, and cunning. Already some of them have escaped and are at large in the island."

"Impossible!" he exclaimed in consternation.

"I have seen them myself, Sire. They are perfectly disguised as natives." A quick look at the window showed me a frightened but not a reprimanding face.

"You are positive?"

"Absolutely, Sire."

"How did they come out?"

"Either by tricking Gato's men, or by connivance with some one, of course."

A rap at the door prevented further discussion.

"That is Gato," the king whispered. "Hide there," pointing to a curtained door in the rear wall.

We were immediately concealed. The place was an anteroom. Through the curtain we could hear and see everything.

Gato entered.

"What news?" the king inquired in a friendly, business-like fashion.

"Everything is quiet, your Majesty."

"How is the weather?"

"It is beginning to clear."

"Good! If the storm has made any wrecks, a cast-away for the sacrifice may drift ashore. That would restore order."

Gato solemnly shook his head. The king reclined in silence, and then asked:

"How many soldiers have you in and about the palace?"

The man was surprised. "Twenty, Sire," he hesitatingly answered.

"Send them to the Council Chamber, and summon Lentala."

"May I ask your Majesty ——"

Gato found a look that he was not accustomed to see. It was evident from the slowness with which he proceeded to obey that he was alarmed and was gaining time for new plans.

Christopher and I stepped forth when Gato was gone. Beela exhibited some fear, but I sent her a smile.

"You," the king commanded me, "observe his manner with his men. You," to Christopher, "follow him to Lentala and see that no harm befalls her; I will show you a way. Don't let him see either of you. Come with me to the Council Chamber immediately after the soldiers have assembled."

Beela nodded to me, and dropped the curtain. The king led Christopher into the anteroom, gave him hurried directions, opened a door leading out of that room, dismissed Christopher, and returned. By this time I was passing out, having observed that no one in the corridor was looking toward me.

Gato had formed his plan, and it contemplated swift execution, as I judged from his prompt, incisive manner with his men. In each instance he gave an order which I knew from the pantomime included the Council Chamber; then, in the man's ear, he added something which brought a start, a stiffening of the body, and an unconscious grip of the sword-hilt. As

the men were straggling past me to assemble, the king leisurely strolled out into the corridor, and was sauntering beyond me, when he stopped, turned, and asked under his voice:

"What are the signs?"

"He has ordered them to kill you in the Council Chamber at a sign from him."

"Umph!" The king passed on toward his living-apartments, which he entered.

When he came quietly walking back, the corridor was clear of soldiers. He slipped a modern revolver into my hand.

"Do you understand its use?"

"Perfectly, Sire."

"May I trust your nerve and judgment to use it at the right moment and without missing?"

"You may, Sire."

"I think one shot will settle the matter. If not,——"

"There will be three of us, your Majesty."

He nodded, passed on, and turned back. He had become transformed, and appeared to look forward eagerly to the crucial moment.

"Gato ought to be here with Lentala by this time," he said.

He walked slowly to the private audience-room, looked in, and strolled back. Near me he stopped short, intently listening.

"Did you hear that?" he asked.

"No, Sire."

"It sounded like the roar of an infuriated animal."

His strolling began again, but with an increasing uneasiness.

"I don't understand it," he said. At intervals he stopped and listened. Finally he came back.

"I sent for her," he explained, "to announce that she was heir-apparent to the throne, and vested with present authority to take any measures in this crisis that would seem proper in her discretion."

I did not know before that my heart could be so touched by such a man.

His impatience at last slipped control. "We will go and see what detains them," he said.

We started down the corridor. At his own apartments he paused to send a servant to the Council Chamber with word that he would soon appear. We had gone but a short distance beyond, when we met Christopher.

"Is all well?" asked the king.

"Yes, Sire."

"Are Lentala and Gato coming?"

"No, Sire."

"Why not?"

"He's in the dungeon, Sire."

"In the dungeon! Locked up?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Who put him there?"

"Me, Sire."

"What for?"

"Your Majesty told me not to let him harm her."

"Harm her! Did he try to?"

"I was there. She wants to see you." He turned to me. "And you, sir."

We three hastened to her apartments, where we found her lying on a couch and attended by a number of frightened women.

"Lentala!" the king anxiously said; "what is the matter?"

She forced a smile, held out one hand to the king and the other to me, gave mine a quick, tight squeeze, released our hands, in a weak voice bade us be seated, and with a wave of her hand dismissed the women.

"What has happened, child?" the king insisted.

"Gato came. I was alone. He didn't know that Christopher was behind him." She was speaking with difficulty, often pausing. "He was impatient. He said he loved me and wanted me. And if I wouldn't marry him, he'd . . . he'd strangle me here and now. . . . That his men were waiting in the Council Chamber to kill you, if I refused him, and then they would kill the queen. . . . I said no. I trusted Christopher. Gato's fingers hooked like that," she showed with her own hands, "his eyes glared terribly, and he came at me. . . . Christopher crept up, said to me, 'Don't scream,' and leaped on Gato. They grappled, and rolled on the floor. Gato roared like a wild beast." Lentala covered her eyes with her hands. "I heard things crack and break. I couldn't look. Then came an awful squeak. Christopher said again to me, 'Don't scream.' It meant he was safe. I felt myself falling. . . . When I saw again, I was lying on this divan, and my women were with me. Gato was gone. Christopher was standing in the door. I asked him where Gato was. He said, 'In the dungeon.' He would say no more, and I sent him for you." She looked at him, and added, "Dear old Christopher!"

His face was blank.

"Can I do anything for you?" the king gently asked.

"No, thank you. I'm only a little shaken, and will be up in a few minutes."

"Would you like the queen to come?"

"No. It would distress her. Not a word of this to her!"

The king led us out. At the door I looked back and won a smile.

We went in silence, and the king stepped into his apartments, bidding us wait in the corridor a minute.

I turned a keen look on Christopher, and he met it frankly.

"Are you hurt?" I asked.

"No, sir."

"Is he badly injured?"

"Him?"

"Yes."

"He don't need no doctor, sir."

"Did he go with you quietly?"

"Yes, sir."

"He'll hang for this, Christopher."

"Sir?"

"The king will hang him for this."

Christopher's gaze wandered vacantly round the corridor, and after a while he quietly said:

"It won't hurt him, sir."

The truth blazed through me. I had been misled by Christopher's perfect calm.

"Christopher!" I cried, seizing his hand and wringing it; but he looked bored.

Chapter XIX. *The Strength of the White Blood.* Extraordinary Discipline by the King. His Uneasiness Concerning Our Loyalty. Lentala's Father. We Must Help Destroy Our Friends. Earthquakes.

Although the king was greatly shocked when I told him what had really happened to Gato, his gratification quickly rose, and he regarded Christopher curiously.

"Why didn't you tell me at once?" he inquired.

"That is not his way, Sire," I explained. "He avoids talking."

"It was a wonderful thing to do," his Majesty mused as we slowly went to the Council Chamber.

Something had given him a fearful blow, and I guessed it was the danger to which Lentala had been exposed. His face was haggard again; his gait was unsteady; he doddered and mumbled.

As we neared the Council Chamber, he said:

"Come in and stand near me, one on either side."

We found the soldiers in a huddle near the door, the racial dulness of their faces somewhat keyed with expectancy. The king gave them but a glance as he passed them and ascended the throne,— to be more impressive, no doubt. Christopher and I stood as flanks.

"Form a line facing me," the king sternly commanded.

The soldiers glanced at one another in wonder as they obeyed, and furtively had anxious eyes and ears

for Gato. They were a fine crowd, selected for courage and dash.

"You understand," the king said, "that I am always in supreme command of the army, including Gato and every other officer. Any person who may be in immediate charge of you is serving as my agent, and is appointed and removed by me at my pleasure. All your fealty and loyalty are for me. You will now acknowledge that with an obeisance to your king."

The rascals were dazed. They might send shifting glances down the line if they liked, and wonder and waver if they pleased, but obey they must: every man felt it in his bones. The line went down.

Etiquette required the maintenance of the posture until the king gave the word to rise. The obeisance consisted in coming to the knees, resting the elbows, well advanced, on the floor, pressing the palms down, and rooting the floor with the forehead,— an easy performance if quickly finished, but a torturing one if sustained. On this occasion the king neglected the releasing command; and that was unheard of. In such a position the men could see nothing.

"A soldier's first duty," he resumed, "is to his king. In becoming a soldier he dedicates his manhood, his strength, his life, to his sovereign; that is to say, to his country. A true soldier is glad to die for the happiness and safety of his king. His duties are as sacred as those of a son to his father. A worthy son will remember the protection that his father has given him. If he hears him defamed, he will uphold his name; if blind, will lead him; if threatened, will defend him though death be the reward. So it is with a soldier and his king."

His voice weighted his words with a deep emotion, and he spoke slowly, with pauses. It was like listening to a passage from the Bible,— but much better read than commonly.

"A king may be kind to his soldiers; that will bring him their love with their fealty, and give their duty a double force. A king may grow old and stand in need of the strong, willing arms of young men whom he loves and who love him. A king may totter under the burden of long service to his people; his soldiers will then be his stay and comfort, and with joy in their hearts will do his high will. Serpents may crawl in the weeds about a king's throne: his soldiers will beat the weeds clear of them."

The king could not have failed to see a painful writhing that wormed through the line. His pause was long.

"A son who hears even his brother speak ill of their father, will reprove the brother and shame him. If that fails, he will chastise his brother if he can; but if the brother is stronger, the dutiful one will take the matter to their father, since the safeguard of the family is endangered by the disaffection of a single member. If a father discovers one of his sons jeopardizing the unity, prosperity, and safety of the family, he will give the faithless son such treatment as the security of the family demands."

The pause this time was still longer. Meanwhile, the endurance of the men had nearly reached an end. Whatever may have been their mental state, their physical was one of excruciating pain.

"Some men are induced to do wrong through heedlessness or blindness, not knowing the gravity of their

deeds, and not foreseeing a dire result. Others are weak and easily led; they are untrustworthy tools of their leaders, and shame is their greatest punishment. Others are cruel and wicked at heart; they will therefore be ready to betray the men who led them to betray others. All of those are poisonous serpents in the weeds about a king's throne. And it is far worse in a soldier than in any one else."

After another pause, he said:

"A king who is kind and wise will be slow to believe evil of his people. It will be natural for him to think that all will be as wise and kind as he. Yet he must be watchful; he cannot protect the people unless he protects himself. If he finds a scandal, he may hide it, lest it weaken the common faith in the strength and purity of his government. If he discovers that any are unfaithful, he will not make their treason public by hanging them before the people, unless he knows that a warning will stop other traitors. No; he will be merciful and keep them privately for a time, till they may walk forth erect in their recovered manhood."

Here and there a gasp or a strangled groan broke the silence of the line. The king was heeding.

"The man at the right of the line will rise."

The fellow came painfully to his feet, and stretched the agony out of his muscles.

"Advance and lay your sword on the dais," ordered the king.

The man obeyed.

"Return to your obeisance."

A start thrilled the soldier. He gave the king a desperate, pleading look, but found eyes with a cold sternness that sent him to obedience.

"The next, rise."

The performance was repeated with him, and with the rest in turn.

"All rise," said the king. They stood up. "I will now take you to a room in the palace, where you may consider in quiet what the soldiers of a king should be. You," he ordered Christopher, "walk beside me at the head, and you," to me, "follow the soldiers."

The dignity of a mighty sorrow sat like a grace upon him as he slowly led the procession. Never were prisoners more securely manacled with steel than these men, though their members were free; and though there was a certain pomp in the march, it was that of a funeral, and the silence was louder than the blare of much brass.

The king turned into the corridor that led to the vaults, and descended the stair. This brought him and the others to the dungeon door. He halted, and Christopher unlocked it. It swung wide. The king and Christopher stood aside, and the men marched in. Christopher closed and locked the door.

"Your Majesty!" I exclaimed; "you surely have not forgotten that Gato ——"

"My son," he calmly answered, "what they have already endured has made the way easier to what they will find in there."

Without haste the king conducted us back to the chamber in which he had received us, and seated himself erect on the divan. He was studying us.

He inflated his cheeks and pursed his lips while his goggling eyes roamed, and queer wrinkles came and went in his face.

"The white blood," he grunted, staring at me. "It

accounts for your keenness. The white blood never sleeps. If it is with you, good; if against you,——" He rose and glared. "Which love you the more, son," he growled, "the white blood or the brown?"

"Your Majesty sees our color. We came freely and offered our hearts, our arms, and our lives to your Majesty. And it is not forgotten, Sire, that Lentala sent us."

"I remember." The growl died in him, and he brightened. With both hands he clutched the edge of the couch. "It takes white blood to fight white blood," he said. "Did your father tell you that?"

"Not that I recall, Sire."

"Black blood and red blood and yellow blood and brown blood always fall before it, soon or late. He said nothing about that?"

"I think not, Sire."

"You know it is true?"

"My father told me much of the great world."

"Then he told you that. And I know. I saw it when I went abroad in my youth. I learned it from Lentala's father. Does it mean anything to you that your mother was a Senatra?"

"It is sufficient that your Majesty and Lentala are Senatras."

The king fixed a keen stare on me.

"You mention Lentala very often," he said.

"She indorsed us to your Majesty."

"Something more is here. That is the white blood in her. In you and in her the white blood knows its own."

His sudden confirmation of my surmise concerning Lentala choked the words in my throat.

"Why don't you speak?" he roughly demanded. "Is it not true?"

I could only gaze at him.

"The white blood finds and knows its own," he went on. "Two hundred and fifty of those with white blood are held on this island by a great horde of those with brown blood. I need a man of the white-blood shrewdness and boldness and courage to manage those two hundred and fifty to the safety of my people and my island. But if I take a man with white blood in his veins, it will side with the white blood that threatens me."

"Would Lentala hand over to treason and destruction your Majesty and the queen and all the other Senatras whom she loves, and the people to whom she belongs and the country that has nourished her?"

"Not wittingly, for she is a daughter of the gods; but the blood, my son, the blood!"

"Sire, a love early planted endures forever."

He rose to fight his despair, and walked up and down the room.

"Yes, it is true," he said at last. "Lentala has proved it. I spared her father, a castaway, because he stopped a great plague that was destroying my people. I myself was stricken, and he saved my life I feared him because he was of the white blood, and because of his wisdom and power. He held the secrets of the gods, and had no fear. I had planted deep in my people a hatred of the white blood; and I required that he not only disguise himself as a native, but remain within the palace grounds. He taught me many things, but I refused to follow his advice to instruct my subjects. He educated Lentala."

"Is he still alive?" I asked.

"He died two years ago. If he were only here now! We became strong friends. Lentala's devotion to the islanders is returned by them almost as idolatry. I know how the white blood can love, but I know also how it can hate; and it knows its own."

He suddenly halted, and wheeled upon me.

"You say," he moaned, "that some of the white men are at large on the island. What mischief are they doing? What mines digging under me? My people are children,—I have kept them so, God help them! I need not alone a wit and a daring to match the white people's, but Senatra devotion as well."

"Your Majesty knows Lentala."

He blazed on me. "Do you love Lentala?"

A fierce tingling raced through me, and dumbness held me.

"She is beautiful and sweet," he went on. "She is steadfast; she is brave and able. There never was a woman to match her. You are big and strong and brave. She found you. Like finds like. Do you love her as a man loves a woman?"

I fought blindly for wit and words.

"Yes, Sire," came the thin, even voice of Christopher.

We both turned in surprise. He beamed on us blandly.

"Does she love him as a woman loves a man?" the king asked him.

"Yes, Sire."

His audacity held me speechless.

"I can trust her—and you," the king said to me,—"so far as blood tempered by love and loyalty

may be trusted, which is farther than it may trust itself. I am old and broken. Come, you two, and stand before me."

We obeyed, I wondering.

"I have no other men to equal you, and I need you. You must serve me. Take time now, and remember your white blood. Remember that it is stronger than your brown, for I have seen its dominance in you today. Remember that when your allegiance is tested in a choice between white blood and brown, the white will be the stronger. Only one thing can save you and me and all my people."

"And that, Sire,——?"

"—— is your manly pride to see and know and overcome your white blood, and serve and obey your king to the end."

He paused, and looked from one to the other, as though expecting us to speak, but we were silent.

"The white blood," he passionately resumed, "is the most terrible thing in the world. It is strong and shrewd; it never gives up; it pursues and fights relentlessly to the ends of the earth; without mercy or pity it hunts down, plunders, overwhelms, exterminates. Only one thing can hold it in check, and that is opposing white blood. Brown blood cannot cope with the white people in the valley, but white blood can; and for the task, the gods have sent me white blood mingled with brown seeded in my soil and grown to it with deep roots. That is my hope and trust."

His gaze of affectionate yearning was on us.

"The duty of your Senatra blood is loyalty to your king; the task of your white blood is to outwit and outdo the people in the valley. I will place Lentala in

command of the army. You must not take a step without her full concurrence, and you will obey her without question. Do you agree?"

"Gladly, Sire."

"A hundred soldiers guard the passes from the valley, and are relieved every day. When not on duty they attend to their private affairs. I will at once send out messengers summoning these to assemble outside the palace wall, in the king's highway passing the main gate. There I will address them and turn over the command to Lentala."

He was profoundly studying me. His words, "to outwit and outdo the people in the valley," were grinding within me, and I longed to demand an explanation. A savage ferocity was manifest through his benignity. To outwit and outdo the people in the valley,— my people, my friends! I would be his tool to betray and destroy them. The bottomless pit should have him first, and the hand that he would turn to treachery and murder would send him thither.

My face must have shown something of what I tried to conceal; for the king, his look growing desperate and malignant, stepped back a pace. There came from somewhere a sharp rap, which made me start, and sent my glance to the curtained window, to which the king had his back. I had supposed that Beela was with Lentala; but there she was at the window, her hand upraised in warning. It brought me instant control.

The king also had heard, and looked round sharply, but the curtain was down.

"What was that?" he inquired.

"My big toe, Sire," answered Christopher.

"What did you do with it?"

"I cracked the joint."

"Why?"

"It feels good, Sire."

His Majesty curiously regarded Christopher's feet. "It must be a large joint," he said.

Christopher stood in gentle silence. The king turned to me, and found me docile.

"That look of rebellion was the white blood in you," he said.

"Only for a moment. Your Majesty may trust me."

Nevertheless, he was troubled, and shook his head.

"He won't no more, Sire," said Christopher.

"How do you know?"

"I know him."

"Explain."

"He does little things short and big things long."

My amused smile was fortunate, because it put an end to the king's tragic gravity.

"I am satisfied," he remarked. "Now, the first thing for you two to do, while the army is assembling, is to go out, find, and bring to the palace all the white men that have escaped. The next,——"

The sentence was never concluded, for there came a rumble and a sharp, pervading jolt. The king stiffened, looked about in fear, and groped for the table. Following was a gentle quiver, which rapidly increased till it became an oscillation, and with it a deep rumbling. It ended in a mighty wrench and a violent swaying, accompanied with a hoarse explosive sound. The stones of the palace were grinding and groaning. The table slid a yard, stopped, and shot back as the king tried to seize it.

I found myself plunging and lurching for a footing

as the oscillation continued, and so were the king and Christopher. They sat down on the floor. Surely the violence would ease in a moment. Instead, the convulsion rose to a fearful crash, which sent my feet away and my body smashing on Christopher. He caught me with one hand and with the other diverted the flying table from the king.

The spasm ended abruptly, but the menacing tremble was again in play.

"Be careful!" rasped the king; "the third is the worst."

As before, the quiver rose through oscillation to a heavy swaying, more violent than ever, and ended in a tumult of jerks, which sent us sliding and scrambling as we fought the portable things that were hurled about the room.

It was suddenly gone. We rose, much dazed. There was no sign of Beela at the window.

"It is over," weakly said the king. "The worst in many years. And what has it done? It has terrified my people into madness. I see them." He was losing self-control, and was staring as at a vision. "They are beginning to rise from the ground. Many are digging out of their ruined huts. . . . Their teeth are chattering. They look at one another in horror. No one has a sister, a brother, a father, a mother, a friend. All are blind and mad. . . . They run hither and thither. They ——"

A confused screech and roar, as of wild animals driven to a focus by a surrounding forest fire, rang through the closed door of the room. The king listened.

"The palace servants," he mumbled through

quivering lips. "They are seeking me — their father and protector. Imagine from this how the island is swarming and groaning, and with a terror that is half vengeance."

The man was beside himself.

"Peace, Sire!" I begged, but he did not hear.

"The terror does not abate: it increases with the freer flow of their blood after the shock. . . . They are beginning to think. They look at one another and see their kind; then kindred and friends. . . . 'The Black Face!' says one, softly. 'Ay, the Black Face!' is the louder reply."

The king stood with clasped hands and closed eyes.

"'This is only the beginning,' they say. 'The Black Face has been denied while it looked down on abundance.' Who has denied it? The heavens ring with the answer, 'Our father whom we loved, our protector whom we trusted, our king whom we have thought a brother of the gods. Why has he flouted the Face and challenged its wrath? What terrors or witcheries have been wrought by the gods of the people in the valley, that our king has gone driveling behind his walls?'"

"Your Majesty!" I called, shaking him by the arm.

He opened glazed eyes, and listened to the howling din at his door.

"The guard are leaving the passes. The white people are wise; they understand, and are joyful. They send scouts. . . . My soldiers mingle with my roaring, mobbing people. They all push and roll through the pools of rain-water in the highways, churning them to mud. They grind their teeth; they laugh horribly, like imbeciles. The palace is their aim,

and their king sits grinning and mumbling there. All the trouble has come from the people in the valley. The white blood breeds all there is of that in the world. May ten thousand curses fall on it!"

He was flinging his arms and lunging about. I woke to the urgency of action, for undoubtedly in his madness he had correctly seen the turbulence in the island, and the sweating hordes plunging over all roads converging to the palace. A glance passed between Christopher and me, and I nodded toward the door, which a packed, howling mass was already straining.

"Come," I said, seizing the tottering king about the waist and dragging him to the anteroom. I thrust him within, and secured the door back of the curtain.

When I turned, Christopher, his hand on the key of the door into the corridor, was listening. There was no sign of Beela at the window.

"What's going on?" I inquired.

"Her, sir."

"She's out there?" I asked in alarm.

"Yes, sir."

"Open the door," I ordered, stepping back to guard the anteroom.

He opened it, swinging behind it against the wall.

It was done so suddenly that those pressed against it fell into the room. The next came tumbling on them, and more on these, squeezing horrible sounds from the mouths of the lowermost, and bringing unpleasant grimaces to their faces. In a second the opening was jammed half way to the top, and still the pile grew. Behind it were frenzied men and women, vociferating prodigiously, and fighting for the diminishing passage to the king.

The pressure outside being somewhat relieved, one of the more agile men leaped on the pile and sprang with a howl to the floor; but Christopher had emerged, and a blow from him dropped the adventurer. The next, less active than the first, was scrambling over the heap, and paused as he found himself grazed by the flying body of the first, for Christopher had picked him up and tossed him over the heap into the pandemonium beyond. The following man drew back, and slid down to the corridor floor.

I had been looking for Beela without, but she was not in range.

Before another maniac could mount the pile, Christopher had dragged a body off the squirming mass and flung it out. Another followed, and another, and others, the succession of them so close that none dared breast the fusillade. Christopher streamed with sweat, and the mildness in his eyes had become a glare.

All this had a cooling effect in the corridor. Christopher, not waiting to look for cracked ribs at the bottom of the heap, cleared the last away, and walked forth. None can say how much his unearthly pale eyes, minatory expression, and extraordinary figure had to do with what followed. I went to the door. A hush fell as he advanced on the mob, which fell back in silent terror. With each hand he seized a man, jammed their heads together with a murderous thwack, shook them, stood them up, left them stunned, and immediately snatched two others and treated them similarly. A third pair and a fourth nursed aching skulls. Christopher swept through the groups with two long, strong arms for scythes, mowing a wide swath as he brushed women along, sent a man spinning

from a blow, dashed another against the wall, and brought them into subjugation with a counter-panic of his own manufacture. He came upon two men with some appearance of character, and ordered them to finish the work and send the people to their quarters. They obeyed him promptly. At last he sauntered back to me, calm but puffing.

Beela approached from the opposite direction. I stepped forward in gladness to meet her.

Chapter XX. *A Habit of Concealment.* Beela Undergoes a Transformation. The Uprising of the People. Contrition of Beela. I Declare Myself. An Amazing Disclosure by the King.

HAT news, my friend?" I cheerily inquired.

"We'll go to the king's reception-room and talk," she answered, looking at Christopher. "Dear old Christopher!" she said, deep and sweet.

"Yes," I remarked; "I left the king in the anteroom." Christopher and I followed her into the reception-room.

"He's not there now," she replied, seating herself, "but with the queen. Christopher, go and stand down the corridor, opposite the queen's apartments, and wait for the king. Those lunatics may break loose again when they hear the mob outside the wall."

He started.

"Christopher!" she called. He turned. "Do you love me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That's all."

I had never seen her so calm and steady, so rich in ultimate qualities, so little the volatile, meteoric, yet wise child-woman who had been my sunshine, my tease, my playfellow. She had become a composed and gracious woman. It came to me with something like pain that this was the truer and finer Beela. There was another feeling,— one of a great need in my life.

She wore a becoming dress that might have suited either a woman or a man; but everything about her spoke of the sweetness and grace that only a lovely woman can have. I was tired of the foolish Beelo sham. We had grown too near for me longer to tolerate that absurd barrier.

"Now for your news, dear Beela," I asked.

There was the slightest start when she heard that pronunciation of the name, but she did not turn to me at once.

"When the earthquake began," she said, "I ran to the queen, for such things frighten her dreadfully. After it was over there came the uproar by the servants. I locked the queen's apartments and kept them out. But their noise frightened her even more than the earthquake, for they battered her doors. It wouldn't do to admit them. Presently the king came by the private entrance, and although he was badly shaken, the necessity to comfort the queen brought him composure. They are together and quiet now. Then I came to this corridor, where the servants were massed against the door. I could do nothing with them. For a moment I was frightened when the door opened, but when I saw what Christopher's plan was, I knew that all was safe. I went then and secured the gates opening to the palace grounds."

"And what's ahead, Beela?"

"The worst," she quietly answered, but gave me a slow, mischievous look over that repetition of her feminine name. "We have a little time before the king comes," she brightly added, "and we need it to rest." There was a challenge in her glance.

"But the mob is coming!" I protested.

"The king told me that you and Christopher and I should be quiet till it assembles. Then he will come for you."

I drew up my stool facing her, took both her hands, and said:

"I have a confession to make, dear friend."

"Really, Joseph?" she exclaimed in mock alarm, pronouncing the name perfectly.

"You know. And you've been only pretending that English wasn't perfectly familiar to you."

She gave a musical, purring little laugh. Any man would deserve great credit for self-restraint in resisting it — and the chin. Thenceforward she spoke in English of the purest accent.

"What's the confession, Joseph?"

"I've known something for a long time, Beela, and I've been deceiving you with thinking that I didn't know; but I did so because you evidently wished me to be deceived. Everything might have gone wrong if I had betrayed my knowledge to you. But it has served its time. You will forgive me for deceiving you,— dear?"

All that went to make her a miracle of precious womanhood was vibrant. There was the same sweet flutter that I had seen before in her velvety throat. Of course she enjoyed her little triumph of knowing that even for a time her deception had prospered, and she was a-thrill with the recollection of it. After that came contrition. A half-smile lingered on her lips, though her eyes were rueful.

"You are good and generous, Joseph, for not giving me a chiding word; and I don't think there is the least of it in your big heart."

"Chiding, sweet girl? I understood your feeling for the necessity of the deception. Your wish is my law, and to serve it is less a duty than a privilege."

There was a slight puzzle in the glow that flooded her heavenly eyes.

"You found it out all by yourself, Joseph?"

"Yes, dear."

"That is remarkable. Neither Christopher nor Annabel gave you the smallest hint? They knew."

"Not the smallest." The hurt of their keeping the secret from me must have shown in my face, for Beela laughed teasingly. It restored me. "You pledged Annabel not to tell me," I said, "and Christopher is silent,— and a gentleman. Is that the explanation?"

"Yes." A soft embarrassment crept over her, and she gently withdrew her hands and sat regarding me in sweet content. "I also have a confession to make, Joseph." She tried hard to look just a trifle anxious.

"What, dear?"

"Joseph!" she cried, frowning and stamping; "how can I think when *that* is in your eyes and your voice! I won't look, and I won't listen." She turned her shoulder to me.

"What is in my eyes and my voice, dear?"

She sat still a moment, and then slowly turned her head a trifle and peered at me as if baffled.

"You mustn't tease me, Joseph."

She saw my smile and again turned away.

"What is the confession?" I asked.

"Let's go back to the beginning. There were two real reasons why I posed as a boy. One was that it gave me more freedom of limb for going through the forest and for scaling the valley wall, and the other

was that it made me less conspicuous to the guards,—I could have escaped if they had detected me. On my word, dear Joseph, I never intended to deceive you long about that."

She cautiously looked round at me, for I was silent. A cheap resentment at learning that I had been unnecessarily tricked must have betrayed itself, for the dear girl took my hands.

"Joseph,——" she began.

"Then why did you keep it up, dear?" I asked.

"Joseph, the time was when your want of perception was mistaken by me for dulness, for obtuseness,—for such a lack of understanding as makes a man or a woman not worth while. But I discovered that it was not dulness at all. For a time I refused to believe that a human being could have what I saw in you."

If I have ever seen wondering fondness it was in her eyes.

"What was it, dear?" I asked uneasily.

"Your trust which sees only the true, and, unwittingly taking into your heart the false with the true, makes the false true with your trust."

I was silent with the deep thankfulness that God had sent such a woman into the world and into my meager life.

"So, Joseph, I prolonged that deception until all doubt of what you are was gone. I am glad that I did, and am sorry that I can think of no more tests." There was a dash of her dear mischief in that speech. "And now that this is a time of confession and understanding,—you started it, remember,—I must say that one of the deceptions played on you—— They were really harmless, weren't they, dear Joseph?"

"Perfectly," I smiled.

"——that one of them was unnecessary. It was *such* fun to play those pranks on you, Joseph! I couldn't help it. I know it was wicked, but you were always gentle and kind, and I knew you would forgive me. Joseph, you would forgive me *anything*, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, dear heart."

"It was delicious to see you walking so trustingly through the complications that beset you."

"Dear!" I cried, my senses afloat and my arms aching for her; "I am only human. Your sweetness——"

She pushed back her chair before my advance.

"And you don't know in the least," she went flying on, "how often I had to leap from one of my selves to the other, and how exciting it was."

I was getting little out of her chatter except the music of her voice and the picture of loveliness that she made.

"Don't you care to know which of the deceptions was unnecessary?" she demanded, trying to look injured.

"Indeed I do."

She came and stood beside me, gazing down into my face and clasping my hand warmly in both her own.

"Beela," she answered.

"Beela?" after a mystified pause; then, thinking that she was teasing, I laughed.

She appeared much relieved, and brightly said: "I'm glad you understand and forgive me. . . . But you resented her at first."

"Beelo had become very precious, dear, and so my

readjustments where you are concerned are slow. But a new fondness grew with Beela's coming."

"Poor Joseph! And *she* wasn't necessary. I am sorry now that I ——"

"*She?* Who?"

"Beela."

I was a little taken aback, but came to my feet with a dazzling consciousness that all the glories of earth were packed into this moment.

"Not at first, dear," I said, "but in time she became more necessary than my life. My heart sits in gratitude at Lentala's feet for sending me her sweet sister."

She was stricken into a statue, and was staring at me as at some strange creature from another planet.

I stood in silent misery. How had I hurt her?

She took a turn of the room, and flung herself on her knees at the couch, buried her face in her arms, and went into laughter mingled with sobs. I seated myself on the couch and laid a caressing hand on her head.

"Beela," I pleaded, "forgive me. Let me know what I have done that hurt you."

"No," she cried. "I wouldn't for all the world! My heart is breaking with gladness!"

Surely no other mortal could have put such startling contradictions into so few words. My hand found hers; she caught it tight.

"You dear old Joseph!" she said. "Choseph, Choseph!"

It was plainly hysteria; the brave soul had been on a breaking strain too long. I drew her to me, bent her head to my shoulder, and pressed my cheek to hers.

"Dear heart!" I said.

She made no resistance, and gradually grew quiet.

"Sweet," I went on, "we have been through many trials together, and there are more ahead. . . . The days were dark till Beelo came. He stole into my heart with hope, courage, and love. A shock came when he passed. I don't know, but perhaps I never should have loved you but for him. He was the sunny highway leading to you; and now I have the daring to lay my love and my life at your feet."

The sigh that drifted through her parted lips had no threat for my anxiety, but she did not answer. Her hand gently drew mine down from her cheek, and she rose. She studied me a moment.

"Let's talk, Joseph. Perhaps we have been hasty." I noted the patient weariness in her voice. She sat beside me, and after a short silence resumed: "I have never loved a man till —— It hasn't been possible here. But you have known beautiful, lovely women."

"Yes."

"And liked them very much."

"Very much."

Her glance fell, and a little quiver crossed her lips.

"You have known Annabel a long time. You were close to her; you and she talked long and often."

"Yes."

"She is beautiful and sweet."

"Exceptionally so."

"And accomplished — and gracious — and has good manners and a velvet voice."

"All of that."

"And she's kind — and gentle — and has high principles."

"True."

"She belongs to your people, your world."

I only smiled.

"Joseph," raising her sad eyes to mine, "you have loved her once, and now love me?"

"I have never loved Annabel, dear heart, but I do love you."

"Why haven't you loved her? How could you help it?"

"Because I was waiting for you."

"You have never told her that you loved her?"

"No. But, dear Beela, I can't discuss Annabel in this way."

Her eyes blazed. "She loves you!"

"That is not true; and no one has the right to say such a thing of a woman without knowing that her love is returned."

Beela bit her lip, and came stiffly to her feet.

"You are unkind!" she exclaimed. "I have a right — a woman's right — to reasons for believing what is incredible without them."

The picture of outraged dignity that she made was so ravishing that I feared my adoration would override the sternness which I had taken so much trouble to set in my face.

"What is incredible, dear?"

She impatiently turned away. I think she did it to hide a smile, but she was too wary to answer. Instead, she drew from her bosom the little toilet case I had given Lentala on the day of the feast, and gravely examined her reflection.

"If I were beautiful like Annabel,——" she began.

"Beela!"

"—— or Lentala, and ——"

"Beela!"

"——and were pink and white ——"

"Beela!"

She made exactly such a face at herself in the mirror as Lentala had, and suddenly turned on me.

"Joseph, Lentala used to be beautiful and good and true, and an angel."

"She is all of that yet."

She returned the case to her bosom.

"I think you nearly loved her once."

My tongue was silent. Beela laughed mischievously; little devils were dancing in her eyes.

"Joseph, I'm serious. Reflect; because it wouldn't be wise to act hastily now and suffer for the rest of life. Annabel would make a perfect wife. She would play no pranks and childish deceptions. You understand her and she knows you. I'm only a wild, uncouth savage."

"Anything more, dear?" I wearily asked.

She gathered breath to resume: "And there's Lentala. She is to be a queen some day, and very rich. With rank and wealth, she would be a shining woman in America, and her husband would be the happiest man in the world; for with all of that he would have the far richer treasure of her love."

"A worthy man will come to her some day, Beela."

"Didn't you think she was — was fascinating?"

"I do think so."

"Reflect again, Joseph: Would you prefer her poor, obscure, wild little sister?"

"Yes. But what right have we to make so free with Lentala's name, especially as she is foreign to the matter?"

Again Beela was offended, but she controlled herself.

"You would be ashamed of me with people of your kind."

"You alone are of my kind, dear Beela; and shame for you would be shame for myself, shame for all that is precious to me."

"Suppose, Joseph, that I should refuse to leave this island."

"The highest privilege of my life would be to stay here with you."

She stood in a melting happiness.

Her rosy mouth was conveniently near. I should have been a fool to let the opportunity pass, and she was not on her guard. She drew back too late. The dignity with which she came to her feet had a new tenderness. I also rose. She gazed at me with a wistfulness that searched all the hidden places in my soul. Never had she been so lovely as in this moment.

"Dear Joseph, take more time. There is something . . . you don't know, though I . . . thought you understood. Now I dare not—— A great fear fills me."

"Love knows no fear, sweetheart."

"Not for itself, but for its loved ones. Joseph, will you forgive me? It was a foolish thing to do, and I am very, very sorry. Your trust has shamed me. Dear Joseph, I—— But first let me tell you something else. The colony must now be marching out of the valley, for I told Captain Mason that a severe earthquake would be his signal for starting at once. Annabel is coming, and——"

The door opened to the king and Christopher. His Majesty, anxious and broken though he was, gave us

an approving smile,— perhaps from what he read in our faces.

"My maddened people are gathering," he said. "It was wise of you to lock the gates, my child. When the crowd grows larger it will begin an assault. That will be the time for me to appear. I will call out the soldiers from the crowd and put them under your command."

That surprised me. "Pardon me, Sire. I understood your Majesty to say an hour ago that *Lentala* was to have command."

"So I did."

"But your Majesty has just said that *Beela* is to have it."

"Beela? I couldn't have said that, as I don't know any such person."

I was dismayed at the king's apparent condition, and Beela in great perturbation was trying to speak. The man must be roused from his shaken state.

"This is Beela, Sire, Lentala's sister."

"She has no sister," he answered clearly, and turned sharply on Beela. "Lentala, have you been playing one of your pranks?" He hurried her away as she was trying to speak.

Chapter XXI. *Both Sides of the Wall.* A Mob at the Palace Gate. What the King Heard Through the Wall. Lentala's Call on Christopher to Save Her. The King Abdicates. Long Live the Queen!

Habit is the strongest force in animate nature. Though I was shaken, the bent of an urgent purpose remained, and I went forward to it with all the will at my command.

The roar of a mob — that most horrible of sounds — smote my hearing when Christopher and I emerged from the palace into the grounds. A turn in a broad, curving walk through the trees brought the barred main gate into view. It was a massive affair of wood, iron, and bolts, with a small wicket, which was closed.

The king, all alone, wearing his crown and his cloak of state, was awaiting us near the gate. He beckoned us to raise a ladder to the wall. It was done.

"I will presently go up alone," he said, calm but sad, "and will talk to them. Men have gone for a heavy beam with which to ram the gate. The crowd is densely packed here. That will make an attack on the gate impossible for a time. It is likely that the soldiers will assemble and clear a working space."

"What can we do, Sire?" I asked.

"Nothing now. The most that I can hope for is to hold the situation until Lentala returns."

"She has gone?"

"Yes. It was something about the white people. I

couldn't keep her. She was confident we could hold the mob."

"And your Majesty's plan ——?"

"I will show myself on the wall, and talk to them. At the proper moment I will call you up. If I am stricken down, you and your brother retreat to the palace. Defend it by any means and at any cost."

His sorrow was too great to be companioned by fear, and it bore an impressive dignity which his haggardness intensified.

"The mob is swelling rapidly," he said with perfect quiet. "Unless a diversion happens soon, many will be crushed against the gate and the wall."

Seeing that he stood inactive, I wondered whether he was so numbed as to be incapacitated; but he cleared the doubt.

"If the beam-carriers force their way through the mass, many will be maimed or killed. I am listening to the sounds."

His coolness and clearness were remarkable. Christopher, unruffled, was studying our surroundings.

"There come the beam-carriers," said the king. "They are much excited, and are not working smoothly together. . . . One fell then; he was stepped on and hurt. . . . Now they are forging ahead. They are blindly ramming the mass before them. . . . A woman is hurt."

The king's back was to the ladder and the wall. He was gazing into space behind me, listening.

" . . . Hark! Yes, that is he,— one of Gato's captains, a big, strong man, with a great voice. He has just arrived, fighting his way through the crowd, and calling the soldiers, telling them that I have

murdered Gato. I have been kind to this man. On the chance of Gato's being out of the way, he sees his opportunity to step into his leader's shoes, carry out his plan, and usurp the throne. . . . The soldiers are rallying. They fight ruthlessly for passage to the captain. . . . It is bungling, cruel work."

"Isn't this the moment for you to appear, Sire?" We had to shout.

"No."

"Let me go up."

"No." He was firm as well as calm. "Wait. The soldiers are unwittingly preparing my moment. I have partisans as well as enemies there. If I showed myself now, it would increase the frenzy. My friends and enemies would at once begin a fight of factions. They could not, would not, hear my voice. I will let the soldiers clear the way."

We waited.

"Why don't they scale the wall, Sire?"

"That will come later,— by the soldiers."

He stood listening. That was trying to my mercurial nature, and almost a mad desire to be over the wall in the thick of the mêlée was straining within me.

The king produced a key, handed it to me, and composedly said:

"That opens the vault containing the cargo from the white people's vessel, including the arms. If I fall, you and your brother will know what to do in defending the palace. But don't be hasty. Be merciful if you can. This outbreak will not last long. Violent earthquakes are likely to come again at any moment, and the red fire and purple flame on the summit make me think that there may be a volcanic eruption."

"What will happen then?"

"The white people will seize the opportunity to escape from the valley,—if they have not already started. That would mean the annihilation of the entire party, for all the Senatras, including the army, would fall upon them. Then my people would be satisfied, and order would be restored."

My respect for his insight gave his words a crushing force. But what did it mean that Lentala had told Captain Mason to bring the colony out?

I was moving toward the ladder under an impulse to be in action, but a firm grasp fell on my arm. An apologetic look of warning reminded me that Christopher never slept when a beloved one was in danger.

The king had noticed nothing, so deeply absorbed was he. A puzzle was sharpening his senses and wrinkling his brow.

"I don't understand that," he said.

"What, Sire?"

"I wish I knew that Lentala was safe."

"How could she be in danger, your Majesty?"

"Her white blood. It makes her too daring." He was looking about, but his attitude of concentrated listening returned. "There it is again!" he exclaimed.

"What, your Majesty?"

He did not answer for a while; then, "Do you hear that?"

"Yes."

"It is a new trouble. It started on the outskirts of the mob, and is drawing nearer. . . . I can't make it out."

He was at the highest pitch of alertness, and was silent for a time.

"Don't you hear the voice? That is no Senatra! His cries — don't you hear them, man? . . . The people are falling away from him in terror. . . . Don't you hear?"

"Yes, Sire."

"They are crying, 'A demon sent by the Black Face! He will take our children, and the hungry Face will devour them!' Don't you hear that?"

"Something of it, Sire."

"The people are stricken with fear. . . . The women are fighting to escape. Don't you hear their screams?"

"Yes, Sire. Isn't it time to mount the wall?"

"No. There is no foreseeing what this diversion will accomplish."

There was a pause.

"He is advancing toward the gate, bellowing. Surely you hear him?"

"Yes, Sire." My heart bounded, for I recognized the voice.

"He is crying in English, 'They brought me out to eat me!' He thinks we are cannibals!" exclaimed the king, aghast.

"All the white people in the valley think so, your Majesty."

He blazed with resentment, but his attention was again concentrated on the proceedings without.

"He is calling me the chief of the cannibals," resumed the king, "and is fighting his way to the gate. He shouts that he must be the first to enter, and that he will find me and strangle me. . . . He is a maniac. The natives have a horror of that malady. The noise is subsiding. Don't you notice?"

"Yes, Sire; and now I will rescue the madman."

I started for the ladder, but with a fierce grip the king withheld me.

"Would you be a fool and spoil everything?" he shouted in a sudden fury.

He was again composed and listening. "Wonderful!" he said. "Some of the men, seeing how easily he clears the way, are hailing him as a leader. They are not the soldiers. . . . The beam-bearers are advancing again, for the madman is opening a passage. They carry the beam on their shoulders. . . . They are gradually approaching the gate. Don't you hear the lunatic shouting?"

"Yes, Sire."

"A considerable body of soldiers must be massed at the gate, awaiting the bearers, but they are silent. They must be consulting what to do. They are drawing their swords."

"Sire!" I cried; "I won't let that happen."

"Wait," he peremptorily commanded. "What is that?" He was listening more breathlessly than before. "Strange! . . . Strange! . . . It——"

"What is it?" I demanded in a rage of impatience.

"I don't understand," he resumed after a pause. "What can make it? There is no earthquake. Did you feel one?"

"No, Sire. But I can't——"

"Wait." His clutch was on my arm. "Surely it can't be the white people from the valley!"

He reeled, and I seized the instant to spring upon the ladder. But I had forgotten Christopher. He turned me round to face the king.

The stricken monarch was standing in a tenseness

sprung from unnamable fears. But he started as something new fell on his hearing.

"No," he said, "not they. Something else. They are growing more quiet. . . . It is a woman. . . . They are hailing her. She speaks. Don't you hear her voice?"

I could hear only a blur of noises.

"She is shaming the women. . . . And sending them away. . . . She is my friend! . . . Do you know the voice?" He seized my arm and gazed into my face.

"No, Sire."

"She is fighting her way through the men. . . . She calls them fools, cowards, ingrates. . . . They are dazed. . . . Only one woman on all this island would have the courage to do that."

"Sire, if you ——"

"She is calling, pleading; she is saying that I am the kind, wise father of them all."

I turned to Christopher, and found a startling transformation. No longer was he the dull, patient, waiting man. Every nerve was strung.

The king's mouth was open; his eyes bulged; his clutch on my arm tightened.

"Listen!" he commanded. "She is ——"

"Sire, you must mount the wall. We must rescue her!"

"No, no! She is in little danger. May the gods give her strength! . . . Hush! What is that? . . . They are going forward with the beam. She is standing erect upon it. . . . Did you hear that?"

"What, Sire?"

"The soldiers are advancing with drawn swords."

With a violent effort I broke the king's grasp and sprang for the ladder, but a giant hand fell on my shoulder and thrust me back. Above the subsiding din rose a clear, unterrified call from without:

"Christopher! Christopher!"

He had been waiting for that. His answer rang keen and far, and he leaped upon the ladder.

"Come when I call," he said to us.

In a moment he was on the wall. In another he had deliberately sent the ladder crashing to the ground. He studied the outer scene a moment, crouched, and sprang into the maelstrom.

Five thousand throats opened at the spectacle.

"The gate, Sire! Give me the gate key!" I shouted.

"No! It would be death. The ladder!"

I knew that Christopher must have acted intelligently in throwing the ladder. Had he done it merely to delay our ascent? When it was up, the king interposed before my clutch at the rungs.

"Your king first," he said.

"Mount then, Sire, in heaven's name," cried I, cursing inwardly at the delay and my own impotence.

"Stay below until I summon you," said his Majesty.

"Your appearance at this time may bring ruin to us all."

Vaguely realizing that he was in the right, I gritted my teeth and waited.

Meanwhile, what was happening to Christopher and Lentala in that swirl of blind mob passion beyond the wall, and what meant the groans of men and the clang of metal? Christopher might save her life until the king should create a diversion, but what could a man do for himself, with a hundred swords at his breast?

As with dignity and deliberation King Rangan stepped upon the broad top of the wall, the afternoon sun came forth in imperial splendor, and wrapped him in its glory. He slowly faced the mob, raised his hand, and held it firmly aloft.

He had been seen before assuming the impressive attitude, and a mighty shout of mingled adoration and derision arose; it continued jarringly till he raised his hand; then gradually it fell into the deep roar of breakers after a storm, and thus faded to a silence broken only by the rumble of distant hordes moving on the palace. The king swept the multitude with his gaze, and spoke:

"Your king has grown old in service to his people, and now——"

"Gato! Gato! Give us Gato!"

"Every true subject of mine holds his life at the service of his king."

"Give us Gato!"

The king stood in an iron silence.

"Show us Gato! We must see him! We must have him!"

Rangan raised both arms, and a hush fell.

"Very well," his deep voice rang out. "You shall have Gato."

Before I could recover from my surprise he turned to me, tossed me a key, and in a manner that showed his perfect seriousness, ordered me to bring Gato immediately.

"Is all well with my brother and Lentala, Sire?" I begged.

"Yes, but go at once!"

I dashed through the grounds and the palace to the

dungeon door, which upon reaching I flung open, and, unable to see within, said sharply:

"Bring Gato." An echo as of emptiness buffeted my voice. "Be quick!" I called.

A stir began to rise. "What is going on?" stole a voice.

"Bring Gato!" I shouted, with a fury in my voice that brought immediate response.

The shadows took dim shapes, stooped and lifted something heavy, and shuffled hastily toward the door.

"On my shoulder!" I rapped.

They laid him across. I slammed the door, locked it, staggered up the steps, and arrived at the foot of the ladder.

The king was still addressing the mob, but his glance fell upon me in answer to my call.

"Bring him up," he commanded. Again turning to the crowd, he said: "Gato is here. You shall see him; you shall have him. From him you will learn what it means to betray your king."

I was nearly at the top of the ladder, which sagged and cracked under the double weight. The king made a detaining gesture toward me.

"Where is the ladder that I ordered?" he asked of those without.

"Here, Sire," answered a liquid voice that ran sweetly over the wall and into my heart.

"Place it, you men. Good. Now you shall have Gato."

I clambered upon the top.

"Stand him up to face the people," directed the king for all to hear.

I dragged the stiffening Gato to his feet, and, my

breast against his back and my arms locked round his body, turned him to the crowd. An inability to credit the senses held them dumb at first. They looked from one to another, horror in their eyes. His Majesty was calmly observing; then he spoke in the awed silence, and his voice carried grief and pity.

"You have called for Gato. Behold him! The gods have long, swift arms for those who strike at your king and you, O my people!"

A groan swept over the multitude; it passed, leaving a stillness inconceivably impressive.

"You wished to see Gato; you have seen him. You demanded him; you shall have him." He gave me an order.

I raised Gato aloft, and started toward the gate, where the soldiers were massed. In a loud voice the king cried:

"Unfaithful soldiers of the king, take your leader!"

I hurled Gato down among them. The heavy body struck something,— I did not see what. Lentala was standing between the soldiers and the gate. Neither Christopher nor Mr. Vancouver was anywhere visible. The people, including the soldiers, were smitten deeply.

"Lentala!" rang the king's voice.

A way to the foot of the ladder opened, and the king gave her a hand at the top. Deep sadness was in her eyes, as she turned them for a moment upon me.

The king, still holding her hand, reached for mine also. Standing thus between us, he addressed the throng:

"My people, these two and the one who leaped from the wall have been tried as by fire. They would

die for their king if he but gave the word. You have seen Gato. Behold these!"

He gazed on the cowed soldiers, and resumed:

"Soldiers of the king, did I but raise my hand, thousands of my loyal and loving people would rend you where you stand. What should be done, my children," turning to the mob, "to honored and trusted sons who would steal upon their father to strike him down with an assassin's knife?"

A murmur which rapidly swelled, and a stir which began to seethe, warned the king.

"Peace!" he cried. "A king can forgive. My soldiers were never bad at heart; they were led away. Soldiers of the king, raise a hand in token of your loyalty."

Every one obeyed. Besides those at the gate were many throughout the crowd.

"Your faithless leader gone, I appoint Lentala, my daughter, as commander of the army."

There was a craning of necks. The soldiers made no concealment of their surprise, but in their gratitude for the king's pardon shouted their acceptance.

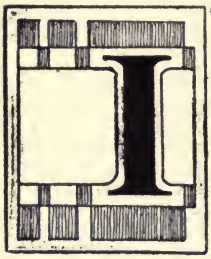
The king laid his hand on Lentala's head.

"I now make this proclamation: I am old and broken, and the grief of this day has brought me near the end. To this one, true and wise, brave and devoted, so deeply loved and trusted by us all, I resign the rulership of my people." He removed his crown and cloak, and placed them on her. "Obey her as you love her, and peace and security will abide with you. This is your ruler henceforth." He raised both arms, and, after a pause, cried, "Obeisance and greetings to Queen Lentala!"

A thrill ran through the gathering, and all sank to the ground. I was on my knees at her feet, pressing her fingers to my lips and trying to speak.

"Joseph!" she scolded under her breath, giving my hand a little squeeze; "don't do that! How can I cry when you are so absurd!" Tears were falling from her lashes. She turned, put her arms on the king's shoulders, and bowed her head, while mighty salvos of huzzas rent the skies.

Chapter XXII. *Wit and Dash to the Fore.* The New Sovereign Assumes Charge. Our Plans for Escape Go Awry. Victims Taken to the Sacrificial Altar. A Bold Act Turns a Tragic Event.



T was some time before Lentala could lift her face to her subjects. The king's renunciation — the finishing touch to the bold diplomacy with which he had turned the crisis — had come to her as a bolt from heaven. I wondered how it would affect her deeply laid plans for the rescue of the colony; for, though it would give her extraordinary power, it would abruptly check her irresponsible freedom of movement. Furthermore, it had thrust upon her the necessity for swift rearrangement. Her hold on neither the people nor the army had been firmly secured. I knew that her quick understanding apprehended the new complications, and that she understood the king's wisdom fitted to the hour's need. She gave me a frightened look, and brightened under my smile.

With reassuring words the old man disengaged her hands, stepped back, and left her to face the crowd. Thus she stood alone between us. It seemed a cruelly trying moment in which to place a girl, but she made the fight to face her duty. It was not long. Her voice, tremulous at first, stole out clear and fine, reaching to the limits of the crowd; and as she proceeded it came rounder and fuller, bearing the richness that I knew.

"Thank you, my people. With the deepest love I

accept the crown, and I pledge my life to wear it worthily. Only love and trust me as you have loved and trusted the good father who has ruled us so long and so kindly, and you will find me faithful. This great change comes upon us at a trying time. Neither a king nor a queen can govern a people without their consent and love and confidence. Give me time to show that I am worthy of all that from you. I shall still have the advice of the good man who has placed upon me the crown, and of his able advisers. But I shall trust your own hearts and heads more than all the wisdom of the palace. I shall trust your confidence in me more than my power over you.

"We all know that there is a special cause for the present unrest. But be patient. The problem is not difficult, and you may depend upon me and my advisers to solve it. Every impatient act of yours shows distrust of your government, and if you rashly do anything to weaken the power of the crown, you lay yourselves open to dangers. The white people in the valley are only awaiting the moment when authority is destroyed and our people are in disorder to come forth and work havoc among us. They stand together as one, and are cool and not afraid. Those are the greatest powers that human beings in community can have. If you had worked your will today, how many of you would be alive tomorrow? Our beautiful island would have flowed with blood — the blood of our people."

She ceased for a moment, to observe the effect. It ran as a low, frightened murmur.

"But nothing can go wrong if we ourselves keep cool and hold together and trust to the crown. The army will camp tonight in the palace walls, and every

care will be taken to keep order in the kingdom. All will be well if you yourselves are calm. Therefore I command you one and all to go at once to your homes, and remain there in quiet and peace. No matter though storms may come, or the earth tremble, or the fires under the ground break forth, be not afraid; trust your queen and your army, for we have no fear. Be as brave and cheerful as we. All your problems will be solved, all your reasonable wishes will be granted, but that must be done by your queen." She raised her arms in the manner of Rangan, and impressively added: "Go now, with my love and my blessing."

Another wave of affectionate loyalty swept over the multitude; it began to disintegrate, and to pacify and turn back belated incomers; but a shrill cry rose:

"Sacrifice! Give us a sacrifice!"

It had an instant effect. The moving crowd halted, and the cry ran to many throats, "Sacrifice! Sacrifice!"

The queen turned to old Rangan, and he almost imperceptibly nodded. Lentala hesitated as she faced the mob again, but refrained from looking at me. She raised her hand.

"Be patient!" she cried.

"Sacrifice! Sacrifice!"

"You shall have——"

The rest was drowned in a threatening shout. Lentala stood dazed, and in the ensuing buzzing and movement lost any opportunity she might have desired for further speech. So she stood as the still noisy crowd straggled off. Unrest had been rekindled, but to what extent I could not guess. The last loiterers often stopped to gaze at the little group on the wall, and the army stood in soldierly ranks before the gate.

"The army will salute the queen," commanded Lentala.

It was finely given with the sword, and the men heartily responded to the oath that she gave them as soldiers of the queen. With a gesture to us that we follow, she tripped down the ladder, opened the gate, and admitted the army to the grounds. Next, after sending to liberate the soldiers in the dungeon, she had the palace astir with an order to prepare for the army a feast and accommodations for the night.

Rangan had been a silent observer of her whirlwind movements. I was not wholly satisfied with what I saw in his face, but with whatever else that I saw there was admiration. Obviously she was permitting him to remain until he should be satisfied that she was capable of assuming command of the army. As matters were quieting she asked him to go to his wife, and he tottered away, shaking his head and mumbling to himself.

She ordered the army to break ranks. The men showed their relief with childish inconsequence, and scattered at will. That left us alone. The bright look that she turned to me was a sudden change from royal sternness to Beela's challenge. She was my little work-mate of the valley.

Something had risen between us; consciousness of it showed in her glance, and I was sore without that. To have tricked me so unnecessarily as to Beela seemed wanton and cruel. Unreasonable as it may appear, I had been shocked so deeply that time for recovery would be required. I had seen the craftiness with the gentleness of the native blood in old Rangan. I had seen his hatred of the white man, and the merciless

savagery that his show of benevolence masked. It had made me distrustful of the native blood, which composed half of Lentala. To the sweet, childish Beela whom I loved had been added something that ——

"Choseph!"

I started, but could not bring a smile into the look that I gave her, even though the call had been Beela's.

"Don't you want to hear what has happened to me?" she asked, ignoring my stolidity.

"Yes, your Majesty."

She stiffened slightly under that address, and subtly put Beela aside for the queen. With a hint of coldness she said:

"At the beginning of the outbreak I foresaw that Mr. Vancouver's guard would decamp; so I went to look after him; but he had already gone after being left alone. I followed him. That brought me to the crowd. When I found myself in danger there, I called Christopher. His daring leap from the wall and the fury with which he laid about him confused the crowd. He was helped by some loyal subjects whom his conduct inspired. I don't know how many skulls he cracked, but no one was killed. I pointed out the men for him to silence. No one could resist him. When he called for the king to ascend, he took Mr. Vancouver in charge and slipped away."

I nodded, but she must have seen my gratitude for her taking such risks on Mr. Vancouver's account. Doubtless that was what made her eyes flash, but at the moment I did not know why. I reflected only that two matters of overshadowing importance must be attended to at once, and that possibly her plans had been disarranged.

"What has become of Christopher and Mr. Vancouver, your Majesty?" I asked.

"I told Christopher to take Mr. Vancouver to the hut, where Mr. Rawley was waiting," she answered, "and then go to meet the colony."

"Thank you. What is to be done with the colony, and what am I to do?"

She raised her eyes, and there was no trace of Beela in them. "I had asked Captain Mason," she answered, "to have each member of the colony bring all the food possible, and had told him that you and Christopher would meet him in the first darkness following the earthquake, at a certain pass just to the west of the clearing where the sacrificial altar is, and that as the natives would be demoralized by the earthquake, you could lead them without much risk past the settlement to your vessel, which might be sailed away at once."

My wonder and gratitude at the intelligence of her plan must have shown in my face, but her tone had no warmth when she added:

"Fortunately, matters have turned out so that I can take the army out of your way. The real danger lay there."

That was why she had admitted the soldiers to the palace grounds and locked the gate. Could any other have given so brilliant a turn to a threatening situation? Yet I only looked at her in silence, and her face had not a trace of the old friendliness. Perhaps it was my own fault. There rang in my ears the demand for a sacrifice; I recalled old Rangan's nod; I remembered the defenseless position of Rawley and Mr. Vancouver; and the brown blood in the Senatra queen unaccountably looked different from the brown blood in Beela.

"Your Majesty," I said, "I will go now and see that all is well with Mr. Vancouver; then I will go and assure a clear opening for the colony, and arrange for Mr. Vancouver and Rawley to join us as we move down the eastern side of the settlement to the harbor."

"Yes," she agreed. I was turning away, but she stopped me. "You will reflect," she said, "that many people in the island are ignorant of what has taken place here today. I will send out runners, but still the entire island can't be covered. All know that a white man has been held for sacrifice to the Black Face in order to stop the earthquakes and avert an eruption. If the earthquake returns, even the people who saw me crowned may become uncontrollable. Should that happen, I am not sufficiently sure of the army to trust it in stopping a sacrifice. There is just one thing to do."

She ceased, and regarded me waitingly.

"What is it, your Majesty?"

She hardened still more. "Let's consider the situation calmly. If some very strong diversion should arise tonight, the colony could pass through to the vessel without risk. On the other hand, the people are alarmed and restless; they won't sleep soundly; many may be abroad in every direction. If some of them should see the colony escaping, a cry might be raised that would ring from one end of the island to the other. That would mean the instant gathering of a mob which no power could resist, and the colony would be annihilated."

"I see, your Majesty. What diversion would prevent it?"

"The sacrifice of Mr. Vancouver and Rawley." She spoke in a cold, business-like tone.

My horror must have been evident. "Your Majesty," I said with warmth, "before that shall be submitted to, every member of our colony will die fighting."

She shrugged. "That is your affair. I should hate to see any of *my* people killed in such a clash. It is interesting to see how jealous you are of Mr. *Vancouver's* safety, when he had planned to destroy the colony."

I saw the drift of her sneer, and was angry and silent.

"He has a very charming daughter," she went on.

The humiliation that she was thrusting upon me was unbearable, but I could be patient, since I carried the lives of the colony in my hands; yet it was not pleasant to see this side of Lentala's nature. The worst of it was that there was no possible argument to bring against hers. Mr. Vancouver richly deserved such a fate, and so did Rawley; their meeting it would certainly assure our escape to the *Hope*. But Lentala could see in my attitude nothing but consideration for Annabel, and she misconstrued that. It was all that I could do to restrain myself.

"I think we understand each other," she remarked after a pause.

"Do you mean," I burst out in a passion, "that you are going to order the sacrifice of Mr. Vancouver and Rawley?"

She looked at me steadily. Afterward I recalled the softening, the suffering, the dumb pleading in her face, but I did not see it at the time.

"It doesn't appear," she quietly said, "that I am called on to tell you any more of my plans at present. You are fully informed as to what you may do in trying

to get the colony to the ship tonight." Her manner was entirely that of a queen to her subject. "I think you understand to some extent what I have done to spare the lives of your people and help them leave the island. I will add that some trusted natives will try to make your passage to the ship safe. But it is one thing to make plans and another to carry them out in the face of a panic. There is no foreseeing what may happen before morning. My scouts will keep me informed every few minutes."

There came an awkward pause. Her head was down; she stood in a waiting attitude. It seemed to me that all the world I loved had suddenly been swept away. Behind the woman confronting me I knew that my dear Beela stood sweet and laughing, all sunshine and dear womanliness. Only a fool would let her go.

"Beela!" I said.

She started, and raised sorrowing eyes to mine.

"Aren't you going with us on the *Hope?*"

"My duty is here now, and I can think of nothing but that."

"Does your unexpected elevation to a queenhood blot out all the past?" I asked.

She bit her lip. "I hadn't expected that from you," she said in sadness.

"Then, is it Annabel?" I insisted.

She did not answer at once. "You will see her again this evening," she gently said.

"Of course, but——" I saw it was useless, and wondered if she was dismissing me. "Surely I shall see you also," I said.

She smiled, but it was not the smile of Beela; it was that of a woman who knows care.

"Perhaps," she returned; "yes, of course,—I think. Meanwhile, good-by," and held out her hand.

I took it, and would not at first let her withdraw it; but with a little sigh, which she tried to conceal, she turned away and walked slowly to the palace.

Heavy-hearted, but determined to see Lentala before the colony sailed,—if it should ever have that good fortune,—I went about my duty.

The first task was to see that Mr. Vancouver was safe, for many contingencies might arise to overwhelm Christopher. I went to the hut where Beela had left Rawley, but it was vacant. Christopher must have taken the two men to a spot near the pass, to meet the outcoming colony. On going to the summit of the valley wall I faced the rising moon. When I had come within a few hundred yards of the spot where the colony would emerge,—it was the spot where Rawley had assaulted me,—I heard the low moaning of a man, followed by his querulous, childish talk. At first I marveled that Christopher should have left his charges in so exposed a place, as it was immediately near the main trail to the sacrificial stone.

"Will she come soon?" Mr. Vancouver plaintively asked.

"Very soon. Be patient," kindly answered Rawley.

The men were invisible in the gloom, but it was imprudent for them to be speaking aloud. Yet I dared not show myself, lest Mr. Vancouver be thrown into noisy mania. Should the natives be seeking him, it would be easy to trail him to this spot; and the colony might be discovered through his presence. Again Mr. Vancouver broke the silence.

"She doesn't suspect me, does she?"

"She is and always will be your loyal daughter."

"I know." His voice was not a madman's. "Raise my head a little. It is bursting. Rawley, I'm damned. The visions I've had! In one of them two men came, looking like natives, but speaking English. One of them spoke of my treachery and my death. I tried to kill him. The other prevented me, and then I saw that they were Tudor and Christopher. And today the one looking like Christopher rescued me from a hell of madmen. But how could I stay in that cabin when Annabel was coming?"

A rumbling and a quivering of the earth hurried me on. I ran to the edge of the valley wall. This brought me nearly opposite the Black Face. I had noticed a faint, weird light on the trees; now I saw the origin of it,—a purple flame was issuing from an orifice below the Face. It waved upward like an inverted streamer, wreathing the Face and lending to it a ghastly lifelikeness.

From below me rose faint cries of terror, quickly stilled, and soon the vanguard of the colony arrived from the valley. The earth-trembling had ceased; the flame was subsiding.

There was some trouble at first in making myself known. Annabel came up with Captain Mason and Christopher, and delayed my disclosure of the plan for escape.

"Where is my father?" she immediately asked.

I informed her, and learned that Christopher had told her all that he knew.

"Take me to him," she begged.

I replied that it would be safer to bring him to her. Directing Christopher to fetch a stretcher from which

a woman had just been lifted, I left with him as the slender procession crept to the summit. Deep anxiety showed under Christopher's calm exterior.

Mr. Vancouver and Rawley were gone! A hasty search in the vicinity failed to discover them. We worked down to the trail leading to the clearing where the sacrifices were made. There we found a stream of silent, soft-footed natives hurrying toward the clearing. No speech was needed between Christopher and me to explain the situation. Christopher's wise plan had gone tragically awry. It had not been difficult for the dog-nosed natives to trail Christopher to the hut, and then Rawley and Mr. Vancouver to the spot where I had found them.

I was thrown into a momentary confusion. Lentala alone had known whither Christopher was to take Mr. Vancouver, and she had argued for his sacrifice as the surest means to save the colony! The thought was sickening. But it was inconceivable that *Beela* should have the heart for such a course,— sweet, gentle Beela! And had not Lentala nearly forfeited her life to the mob in trying to rescue Mr. Vancouver?

Christopher had slipped from my mind; but I observed him now, and he was listening far. I waited, knowing that by this time the two victims were already at the altar, and that the earthquake a few minutes ago had lent a fierce impetus to the proceedings. I could mentally see the main settlement and its outlying regions swarming as the whispered news flew from mouth to mouth that two white victims for the sacrifice had been found.

Christopher soon turned to me.

"They'll have to get wood, sir," he said.

"Yes. That will take time, but there are many men."

Lentala had said that her scouts would report often; but there was a chance that they would either conceal the present movement from her or give her the news too late. Even should she be starting at that moment, it would not be possible for her to arrive in time to stop the sacrifice. Yet she should be informed. If she refused to come, then I should know ——

"Christopher," I said, "go and tell the queen." I said nothing of a desperate plan that I had formed.

Christopher looked at me strangely. "Yes, sir," he replied. "And you can save 'em."

He gave me a look of dog-like love, and vanished.

I returned to Captain Mason, avoiding Annabel, and rapidly placed the entire situation before him. His jaws set hard in the moonlight. I could imagine his thoughts, which no doubt agreed with Lentala's; and I realized the terrible risk to the colony when the fanatics should find themselves balked in the sacrifice and should swarm in a search which the colony could not escape — unless my plan should prove successful to the last detail or the queen should bring up the army in time to prevent a battle. And there was mighty Christopher, the man of courage, resourcefulness, and prompt action. I hurled these arguments at Captain Mason, and pointed out Annabel, standing alone and suffering as she awaited her father.

"You and Hobart and I will make the dash," I urged. "It is the only chance, and we must hurry. Dr. Preston can be taken into the secret, and can quietly prepare the men to fight if necessary. They are all armed; the savages are not."

He responded by calling Dr. Preston and charging him as I had suggested, particularly warning him not to alarm the colony. Then he went to Annabel and gave her some quieting explanation. I borrowed a capable knife from a sailor, and we set out.

We bore down to the trail, and found it still swarming with a scurrying horde, all proceeding with a stealthy swiftness. Then I struck out on a straight course through the tangled forest, leading Captain Mason and Hobart a breathless pace. On arriving at the edge of the clearing and concealing ourselves, we found hundreds of savages already assembled and more pouring in.

"There they are," I said, pointing to a considerable open space between the sacrificial stone and a packed mass of men formed in a semi-circle, those in front sitting. Midway between the stone and the natives were the two doomed men, dim in the moonlight. The one lying on the ground was doubtless Mr. Vancouver, perhaps unconscious. Rawley, though his hands were tied behind him, sat erect, calmly facing his tormentors.

As Captain Mason and Hobart had no disguise, I alone must bring the two men out. My companions would take them to the colony; I would remain to face the issue and divert the pursuit. Captain Mason looked very grave, but Hobart was all eagerness; I could guess that his sore spirit yearned to heal itself by sharing my risk. A longing for Christopher,—for his far-seeing eye, his steady nerve, his quick hand,—came over me.

"I remember," I explained in showing why I should not make the dash at once, "that a ring was

fastened in the rock about where Mr. Vancouver and Rawley are sitting. They must be chained to it. I must wait until they are released."

We knew that the delay would mean an augmentation of the crowd and the danger.

Of course the theft of the wood had been discovered. The hut sheltering it had disappeared; its poles and dryer thatch were already piled on the altar. The sacrifice was only delayed, for two-score natives were coming in with dry wood for which they had foraged. In that pursuit one came near us, and I made ready, but in his eagerness he passed on, unseeing. The priest at the altar received the wood, examined it, cast out the useless, and carefully stacked the pyre, which steadily grew.

Silence rested on the crowd. Here was religion in its naked birth,— the elemental man using torture and murder for prayer, with greater reverence and faith than I have seen in some modern fashions of placation or appeal. Fronting them across the dim chasm of the valley was the embodied Force whose wrath must be appeased. Could the white blood in Lentala permit this form of worship?

We could see through the trees the indefinite black mass of the Face. At small intervals came low subterranean growls and slight tremors of the earth. It was as though the underground gods were gathering their strength.

Finally the priest's work was done. He slowly went to the chained men, stood over them, and raised his hand. Four men came forward, followed by four others, who took positions back of him. Twenty more came and formed a cordon about the altar.

The first four knelt, and the chains fell clanking. Rawley rose without assistance. Being speechless with a gag, he implored in dumb show for Mr. Vancouver, offering himself alone. There was a low colloquy between the priests and the four, at the end of which his gesture commanded that Mr. Vancouver also be taken to the stone. As two men stooped to lift him and two others took each an arm of Rawley, the priest began a solemn chant in a minor key, and started the slow march to the pyre, Mr. Vancouver on the shoulders of two men, Rawley walking firm and erect.

At the altar the priest ceased his chant, which was taken up by the crowd; but, though there were many hundreds of voices, they were so soft and in such fine unison that the volume was hardly greater than that of a dozen men. As it proceeded, the priest picked up a vessel containing smothered coals, blew them into life, and ignited the thatch at the four corners. Evidently the victims were to be further tied, and tossed aloft when the fire was hot.

As the priest stepped back to see the blaze rise, I bounded into the open.

I remember that the fire was hot in my face as I reached Rawley and nipped his thongs, and that the astonishment on the priest's face was comical. Also, I was conscious of a numbness in my right hand. I had used my fist perhaps more vigorously than necessary. Two or three natives were prone when I shouldered Mr. Vancouver and called to Rawley, and the darkness of the forest soon concealed us.

A roar delayed by astonishment rose behind us; a thousand devils had opened throat and were leaping to the pursuit.

Chapter XXIII. *The Great Catastrophe.* A Powerless Ruler Confronts a Mutiny. Death of the Sovereign Demanded. The Army Under My Command. Christopher's Sacrifice. The Final Cataclysm.

After a hard run, I laid Mr. Vancouver across Hobart's shoulder. There was no need to urge all speed to the colony. I turned back to meet the pursuers, and ran swiftly until I encountered the foremost. Before they had seen me I dropped to the ground and was diligently examining it when they came up and halted, others running behind.

"Which way?" inquired the first.

"Stand back!" I said. "I have the trail."

They obeyed, but my knife was ready for a contingency. I pretended to lose the signs, but found them again, followed a few paces, and announced that the fugitives had turned there and headed for the trail. "That will bring them into a trap," I added, "for people are still coming up the trail to the clearing. I will follow the runaways and give the alarm. You men spread up and down here, for they may double back. When others come from the clearing, turn them all back, for they will spoil the trail and I never can find it again. Then you too go back if you don't hear from me very soon. Send a man at once to the priest, and tell him to hold the people there, and to order up more wood and prepare for the sacrifice. I am a Suminali man and can trail like a dog."

I was turning away, but paused, to make sure of them. "Have you heard the news from the palace?" I inquired.

"No."

"The king has given the crown to Lentala, and the command of the army also."

It surprised them. "Where's Gato?" asked one.

"He disobeyed the king, and is dead," I answered. "Tell the news to the priest. Spread it among the crowd." It was on my tongue to add that the queen would soon appear with the army and disperse the crowd, but there were dangers in it, and I held my peace. Sufficient for the present that I had stopped the pursuit.

On arriving at the road to the clearing I found a commotion, and learned that the army was rapidly approaching. The people did not know how to take that news,—whether it meant a forwarding or a breaking up of the sacrifice.

There came a scrambling of stragglers to escape the army, which advanced on the trot, Christopher running in front. He saw me, wheeled, and raised his hand. I knew that his glance at my face had told him the whole story. My heart swelled to see Lentala, borne aloft in an uncanopied crimson velvet palanquin emblazoned with the royal insignia. Her dress was the one she had worn at the feast, with the addition of the crown. In her hand she carried a naked sword, fine and lean.

"Make way for the queen!" at intervals shouted a man running ahead of the queen and behind Christopher.

On seeing Christopher's signal she raised her sword,

and the palanquin halted. She was anxiously watching the glow from the altar fire, but her glance discovered me, and a surprised joy sprang to her face.

"Am I too late?" she called in English.

"No, your Majesty. All is well."

"Choseph!" she chokingly cried, throwing her sword away and seizing both my hands.

It was a public scandal. The soldiers stared.

I gave her a warning look, and said, "Your Majesty!"

She drew away with freezing dignity. A soldier picked up her sword, wiped it as he would a baby's face, knelt, and handed it to her. She slammed it angrily into its scabbard, gave me a crushing glance, and opened her lips to speak, but I drove the words back by suddenly dropping in an obeisance. I would have given a good deal to see her face in the long pause before she bade me rise. My face was grave as I met her angry, suspicious gaze.

"This is no time nor place to make fun of me," she cuttingly said.

"I beg your Majesty's pardon."

She was studying me. "You have seen Annabel, I suppose?" she inquired.

"Yes, your Majesty."

"And talked with her?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"You — were glad — to see each other?"

"Very, your Majesty."

"She is as lovely as ever?"

"Quite, your Majesty."

She examined the splendid jewel in the head of her sword-hilt, looked up with a composed face, and

demanded that I tell her what had happened. I did so, and she beamed, forgetting Annabel.

"I'll take the army to the clearing," she said, "put a stop to the nonsense, and send the people home."

She said it confidently, either ignoring the danger or ignorant of it. Evidently her purpose was the protection of the colony, but I surmised that some power greater than hers would be required. Christopher had been standing near, a silent listener.

Her imposing arrival had a strong effect on the restless mob as in the cross-light of the moon and the altar fire she stood up in the palanquin and raised her sword for attention. She told them of her crowning, made a plea for their confidence, and commanded them to go home. But she said nothing about a sacrifice.

No sign of obedience appearing in the crowd, she gave me a glance that sought guidance. I knew that the moment was critical and the risk great, but it seemed the only recourse. I glanced at the army. She understood, hesitated a moment, and ordered the soldiers to clear the place. A slight movement and a buzz ran through the ranks, but there was no forward movement. Then rang a cry, instantly taken up till it became a roar:

"Sacrifice! Sacrifice!"

Lentala sprang to the ground, waved the palanquin-bearers away, and with a free sword confronted the soldiers, her head high, her eyes flashing. I knew she realized that there was but one way out of the desperate dilemma, and that she was casting about to find it without a confession of failure. Clearly she knew that, although old Rangan had deeply planted a sense of

loyalty in the soldiers, she was hampered both by a want of experience in handling them and by the pressure of the mob behind her, which was swelling its demand for a sacrifice to a mutinous outbreak that the soldiers would have no spirit to meet, they being in sympathy with the movement. It became necessary for me to act.

I sprang forward and prostrated myself before her.

"Rise," she said, extending her sword over me.

When I had come to my feet she gave me her sword, and said, her voice ringing clear and far:

"I must go among my people and quiet them. You were King Rangan's friend; you are the man who threw Gato from the wall,—Gato, who had been unfaithful to his sovereign. I give you command of my army while I go among my people."

I took her sword and promptly faced the bewildered ranks as Lentala drifted away; but not until I had seen that Christopher was observing; he would understand that I had turned her over to his protection.

It was fortunate that on the beach and during the march to the valley I had closely observed Gato's method of handling his men. They were crude soldiers and their drill was childish, but my training knew the value of discipline to any extent, and I remembered Gato's tactics. More important than any evolutions that they knew was the spirit of the one commanding them.

I rapped out an order for company formation, as the men were in loose order. As I had expected, some of them stared at me and the others at the rapidly growing mob spirit before them.

It should be explained that Gato's organization was

wholly different from that of civilized nations. While the men composing the army came nearly to half the number of a modern regiment, and while some rude idea of subsidiary groupings had been observed, the absence of actual experience in warfare had made the organization hardly more than a stolid, pompous mob, and the under-officers little besides repeaters and enforcers of the general orders. All officers were merely the "general's" staff.

I did the best I could with such a machine. Upon repeating my order in a still sharper tone, and seeing only an uneasy, tentative pretense of obedience, I sprang toward the officer whom I may call the lieutenant-colonel, stung his cheek with the flat of my rapier, and sent him spinning down the ranks. Another officer instantly found himself treated to a similar slap, and another, as I continued to shout the order. The fourth, a sullen brute, took the blow without wincing, and in both hands began to raise his sword to cleave me. He never knew what it was that sent his blade clattering to the ground; and his attention at once became engaged in a spouting rip in his arm. That brought the staring regiment to its senses; the under-officers all sprang to their duty.

Then, charging up and down the front rank while I raked the stomachs of the soldiers with my sword, I ordered platoon formation. Under other circumstances it would have been amusing to see the officers scrambling for minor commands not already occupied. Evidently there had never before been such sprightly movement required of them; my rapier continually flashed, and men winced when it came near.

Having thus secured control, I was in a dilemma.

My purpose was to face them about, so that they should not see the turbulence rapidly increasing in the mob; but that would bring them facing the altar fire, which was burning emptily, reminding them that the people had been cheated. But there was no choice; I must be where I could face the storm breaking over Lentala and Christopher. There was no time for marching to secure a back-presentation to the mob; I must risk the awkwardness of a reverse formation.

The command to about-face was promptly obeyed, and the soldiers appeared to be surprised on finding me again before them. It was necessary to keep them absorbed in maneuvers, which, of the simplest kind, such as they could understand, I immediately put in force.

This did not distract my attention from the turbulence centering about Lentala. I saw the densely packed and highly excited mob crowding her; I heard the shouts for a sacrifice, the calls to the army to join the rebellion; I heard her clear, steady voice; I saw now and then glimpses of Christopher standing as a rock behind her; and all the time my sword was swinging and my orders were keeping the army at work. It would be but a matter of time when I might turn it to the service of the queen, but the danger was pressing alarmingly.

Of a sudden there was a commotion about Lentala. Before I could turn over the command to the officer next in rank and go to Lentala's rescue, Christopher, bearing her on his shoulder, broke through the mob, skirted my left flank on the run, and bounded toward the altar, the flames of which had sunk almost to a mass of glowing coals, exceedingly hot. Without

attempting to comprehend his movement, but seeing that he had brought the queen behind the army for some purpose, I instantly opened the order of my men, commanded swords drawn, and cried:

"The queen's army to her defense!"

The command was taken up by every subordinate officer. Again the men found me facing them as the mob came howling at my back; but the double line stood firm as an interposing wall before the queen. Then I knew that I had them in hand, but I dared not risk a charge, and I must see what Christopher was doing. The tumbling mob halted before the drawn swords.

When Christopher reached the altar he stopped and turned, he and his burden making a striking silhouette against the red heap of coals. She appeared unconscious, for she hung limp over his shoulder, her arms pendent. The halting of the mob and Christopher's pause aided his unexpected dash in sending a hush on the crowd. In the midst of it rose Christopher's voice for all to hear:

"We'll sacrifice the queen! The queen!" With that he flung her to the ground and began savagely to tear her outer skirt into strips, with the obvious purpose of binding her.

The scene was clear to the mob through the open ranks of my men. I was no less appalled than were the savages at the audacity of the move and Christopher's ferocious method of procedure. And I made no attempt to keep the soldiers from turning their heads to see. My task was instantly to find my cue in the drama that Christopher was playing. It came before I was ready. As Christopher, after the binding, which

required but a moment, was carrying Lentala up to the pyre, she began to struggle, and called:

"My soldiers, save me!"

I bounded through the ranks as I gave the command to about-face and forward double-quick. But I outran the soldiers, struck Christopher down with my sword, and caught Lentala as she was falling. The shortest instant was needed to cut her bonds, but that was sufficient for me to lose control of the situation. Christopher's splendid ruse had succeeded in saving the queen from the mob, and I knew that nothing concerning himself mattered beyond that. Indeed, I have always thought that he deliberately chose the time to give his life for her sake.

As the old king had said, the natives were children, and the sudden revulsion of feeling in favor of the queen was more even than the soldiers, who had a little discipline, could calmly bear. A wave of passionate devotion swept over them. It was only a mob that I faced with my sword as I stood before Lentala. Christopher was lying face downward on the ground as he had fallen. I knew he was unhurt and free to make a fight for his life. None could have realized more clearly than he that the mob would take vengeance on him, but none could have better understood that his resistance might imperil the queen. He had simply made the bold play for her sake, had won, and then lain down to die.

I could not bear that, nor could Lentala, who comprehended. Without hesitation she left me and bent over him, to receive the blow, and was careful that he should not know her purpose. I did what I could, shouting, commanding the soldiers to form, waving

my sword menacingly. It had a staying effect, and I cannot now say with certainty that it would have failed.

Suddenly, with a sickening sensation, I felt the earth tremble beneath my feet. A strange sense of dizziness, of reeling, made my movements waver. The soldiers also were staggering, and their purpose to rend Christopher appeared to be relaxing; but nothing could withstand the pressure of the mob behind them. I had barely time to snatch up Lentala and cut a way back to the altar before Christopher, whose glance found Lentala and me safe, began to rise as the lurching horde hurled itself upon him.

In a staggering run, nearly tripped at every step, I bore her to the edge of the clearing, on the side toward the colony, and hid us both in the shadows. When I had picked her up she buried her face in my shoulder and clung to me with both arms round my neck.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A volcanic eruption."

"Where's Christopher?"

I put my hand on her lips, and she trembled as she clung closer. She was silent as the earthquake increased in violence, and presently asked:

"Do you see it, Choseph?"

I had been observing it since we were seated. "Yes. It is at the river passage. The mountain appears to be blown out there, and——"

"Stop!" she cried, holding me closer.

Undoubtedly the eruption had occurred at the boiling cauldron that we had passed under the mountain. Its first violence was already spent, and the earthquake was subsiding; but I reflected that the water from the

valley stream and from the crimson fall must be pouring into the hot interior, and that the end was not yet.

The ejecta of the outburst were already falling about us from the great height to which the explosion had thrown them. Hot stones of all sizes rained. Had not the forest been damp, it would have broken into flame at a thousand places.

The writhing savages in the clearing were but dimly visible. No definiteness came out of the mass still crowded and heaped where we had left Christopher. All sufficiently near for me to see sat staring at the Face, which was now clearly taking its vengeance; all were moaning and howling, and prostrated with fear.

A deep-red flame rose with a rushing noise from the seat of the eruption as renewed rumblings and roarings came from the quivering ground. The rising flame plunged into a rapidly spreading canopy of smoke and ashes from the initial explosion. The hither edge of the vast cloud was wan in the moonlight, but the under surface reflected the crimson of the flame. All things adopted that dreadful hue. The green foliage took it on as the muddy purple of decay; the brown faces of the natives looked as if beaten to a pulp.

There came another light, and it woke a more insidious terror. Striating the crimson column and issuing snakily from many independent orifices distributed over a wide area of the valley rim, was the purple flame. And now the most wonderful of all was the great Face itself. The crimson light caught it in profile, and thus so sharpened its features as to make it seem a living monster of inconceivable ferocity. Nor

was that the worst. The purple flame again issued from below the face with a great augmentation. In rising and spreading it cast a thin veil over the visage, making it ghastly.

The falling of heavy stones ceased, but the more numerous small ones began to pelt us. I drew my coat round Lentala's head, and broke tree-branches within reach to shield her body, for the stones had a vicious sting.

The heat was growing, both by radiation from the crimson column and by reflection from the canopy. Flames were leaping from the forest near the eruption, for the heat was drying the leaves.

As the ground opened in many seams under the strain, steam found numerous issues on the front of the opposite valley wall, near the Face. The quaking of the earth deepened; the moans of the natives became cries of frenzy.

"Is it growing worse, Joseph?"

She had been Beela since the scene at the altar, and I had nearly forgotten Lentala. It was sweet to feel her breath on my neck as she clung like a frightened child.

"Be brave," I said. "Remember, we came safely through the passage."

"I will, Joseph," but I felt a sob against my breast.

The increasing heat began to make wild mischief in the air. Little whirlwinds had been rising, twirling leaves upward. All at once they ceased, leaving an ominous calm. Then came a rushing, swirling roar, with the crashing of trees,— the noises of a tornado. I looked round. Nearly in a line with the moon rose a spinning column bearing upward dismembered trees,

liberating them far above, and sending them down destructively. This monster, whose seizure would mean death, was mounting the slope in its approach to the volcano, and seemingly would sweep the clearing in its passage. I did not know what to do, and did not wish Lentala to see what was coming, but I must unconsciously have given an alarming sign, for she silently caught her breath and tightened her hold.

As I was looking about in helplessness, an extraordinary vision of tatters and despair staggered toward us out of the forest, peering about. Her staring eyes found me, and she stopped in fear.

"Annabel!" I cried.

Lentala sprang to her feet, her terror gone, and stared for a moment; then, springing forward, she took Annabel in her arms before I had reached her.

"Where is my father?" begged Annabel, recognizing us both.

"He is safe with Captain Mason at the colony, dear," Lentala sweetly answered.

I confirmed the news, and because she was much more deeply shaken than Lentala, I took her to myself and made her sit on the ground. I seated myself beside her, took her hand, and told her cheerful things about her father and Mr. Rawley. She had become suspicious and left the colony to search for her father before Captain Mason's return with him.

She was quietly sobbing in gratefulness. A woman's gentler offices were needed now, and I looked round for Lentala. To my astonishment she had disappeared. That alarmed me. In looking about for her without leaving Annabel I discovered that the tornado had torn away the trees on the opposite side of the clearing, and

was breaking to pieces after tumbling into the valley; but I could not guess what havoc, if any, it had wrought in the clearing, and a profound uneasiness on Lentala's account made my duty to care for Annabel irksome. Even at the best, the collections of the tornado were falling about us and on the clearing, and an increase of the dismal howling indicated cruel results, in which both Lentala and Christopher might be involved. And the danger to Annabel and me was great. I did what I could to protect her from the merciless rain of riven timber.

It had been impossible for me to abandon hope on Christopher's account. Even though I believed that he had lain down in perfect content to give his life for Lentala, the eruption had offered him an opportunity for which he must have been ready. If he was alive and anywhere near the zone of Lentala's danger, she would be cared for. I could accept no other faith than that he was.

Annabel reasonably secure and quiet, I noted the progress of the catastrophe, knowing that Christopher would let me hear from him soon, if at all. The trembling of the ground had become remittent and more violent. The cries of the natives were falling to despairing moans. The tripping ground had made their flight impossible, even had fear not paralyzed them. Besides, the effect of the weird light on the Face was sufficient to hold them in a fascinated helplessness.

The volcanic pillar of fire had shortened, for the still spreading canopy was thickening downward. The roar was louder, with occasional detonations from lateral explosions which smashed the mountains

environing the western end of the valley and made a still wider breach in the opening blasted by the first outbreak. The purple flame had found new exits, lending the opposite valley wall a cadaverous light, and, with the spreading flame issuing from below the Face, giving the horrible visage an unspeakable hideousness.

Worse than all that had gone before came next. The canopy suddenly effaced the moon, and looked like an enormous mushroom on a blood-red stem. Violent gusts of wind fell here and there with a rending force, working havoc in the forest and among the natives. Now and then rose a sharp solitary cry from one struck by a falling stone or spattered by blistering mud. At times a swarm of cries rang from the dip of scorching gases. Clouds were gathering. Lightning flashed between them and the canopy; the crash of near thunder swelled the tumult. I tried not to think of the colony.

"Where is Lentala?" cried Annabel in my ear, rousing out of a half-stupor.

"She has gone to the clearing," I ventured.

"Go and find her," urged Annabel in fright, forcibly withdrawing from me.

"How can I leave you?"

"I am safe here, and will wait for you. Go!"

I obeyed, staggering into the clearing and falling over the kneeling or prostrate savages. My heart presently gave a bound of joy; for, working side by side, fearless and devoted, were Lentala and Christopher, apparently unhurt, and doing all they could to pacify the frantic natives, encouraging them, binding their wounds, and sending them to the service of others, thus

rapidly starting centers of control and help that enlarged with magical rapidity. I came near, but the two who were dear to me did not observe, so intent were they on their duty. I had never seen so lovely a look on Lentala's face, and I determined to let no foolish barrier stand between us thenceforth. Christopher saw me first, but gave no sign whatever. Then Lentala, and there was a divine light in her startled, happy face.

"You came to me, didn't you, Joseph?" she said, seizing my hand.

"Annabel discovered that you were gone, and sent me to find you."

Her face went blank, and she dropped my hand. Terrible though the moment was, her childishness angered me. It was no time for coquettish discipline.

"She wants your Majesty," I said. "Shall I bring her to you?"

Her eyes flashed, but she replied, "Take me to her."

I tried to take her hand, in order to lead her, for the ground was rolling and there were unpleasant things to see on the way in the red glare; but she walked alone and as steadily as I. As we approached the trees there came a sickening heave different from the earth-movements before. Christopher sprang past us toward Annabel, shouting:

"Down — on your faces!"

I seized Lentala and lurched ahead, but before we had quite reached Annabel and Christopher we went down in a blazing crash.

* * * * * * * * *

"Shake yourself up, sir," came in a thin voice from a great distance.

I could open my eyes but a moment under the vigorous shaking that Christopher gave me, for slimy, warm drops were falling on my face; but I had met the darkness that the blind know. A painful throbbing made my head roll as Christopher dragged me to shelter and propped me against a tree.

"Where are we?" I asked. My groping hands found a prone body at my left. I opened my eyes, and the world was blotted out.

"Keep still, sir."

"Are they both here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alive?"

"Yes, sir."

"Choseph!" came feebly from the body under my hand.

My arms went round her and drew her up.

"Where's Annabel, Christopher?" I asked.

"On your right, sir."

"Unconscious?"

"Yes, sir."

Lentala lay collapsed in my arms. The rain of mud from the canopy pattered and splashed about us. The ground was still, and there was hardly a sound except the slimy drip.

"The volcano has stopped, hasn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

I asked the next question in the conviction that I had been stricken blind: "Is there any light at all?"

"No, sir."

Lentala clutched me. "I'm glad, Choseph! I thought I was blind."

"What happened, Christopher?" I asked.

"The world blew up, sir."

"What then?"

"Darkness."

The rain had extinguished the forest fires, and the sirupy drip was mingled with the hissing of hot stones. There was nothing to do but wait. Wails began to creep out of the silent clearing. Lentala drew away.

"Poor children!" she said. "I can teach them better now. There's a good life ahead for me here."

Clearly she was thinking of nothing else, and she said it with a simple earnestness. During all these dark months her every plan and act had been for her own and our escape from the island. I had thought that she accepted the crown as a temporary expedient to restore order and save the colony; but now I knew that, while she still intended to send us safely away, she had severed all other bonds and would give her life where it was most needed. The conduct of the people during the eruption had given the finishing touch to her decision. It was the putting away of all her hopes and dreams; it was the dismissal of me.

I sat a moment in a desolate silence, and found her hand. She returned my clasp, but it was different from any she had ever given me before. It grew firmer, imparting a silent message of finality.

Chapter XXIV. *The Parting Hour.* A Chapter of Startling Surprises. The Fate of the Black Face. A Story of Two Girls. Wanted—a Coadjutor to the Crown. Beela Comes Back at Last.

There was something portentously solemn in Christopher's manner when he came one brilliant morning with a summons from the queen to lunch with her and Annabel. I was aware of Captain Mason's notice to her Majesty that in two hours the colony, which had been royally entertained in the palace and its adjunct buildings since the great catastrophe, would file past to bid her farewell. My absorbing duties in directing the stowing of the *Hope's* cargo had kept me away from the queen and Annabel, who had become devoted friends; but a more potent barrier had been her Majesty's cold reserve under her assumption of her queenly duties, which had been exceedingly severe. The destruction of the Black Face by the eruption had been joyously accepted as heaven's endorsement of her accession to the throne, and the natives idolized her.

Nothing seemed clearer than her wish that I do my part to make as smooth as possible her determination to forget what had passed between us.

Confident, therefore, that she would carry off the parting pleasantly, and appreciating her kindness in inviting me, and her tact in providing for Annabel's presence, I went with as stout a heart as I could command. Christopher and I had long ago laid aside our

disguise. He led me in silence to the private room where Lentala had dreamed of a bright life far away. A table was set daintily for three; and as there were no native attendants, I knew that Christopher was to serve. Rangan was near the end of his days, and Rawley gave constant attendance on deeply stricken Mr. Vancouver.

As I entered, I heard the queen and Annabel chatting with astonishing gaiety in an adjoining room, the doorway into which was closed with a curtain. Whatever they were discussing was interrupted by my entrance.

"Choseph!" came challengingly from beyond the curtain. It was Beela's voice, though every trace of her had disappeared since the eruption.

"Your Majesty," I responded.

"Nonsense! Aren't you going to behave?" It was Beela's scold and the impatient stamp of her foot. "I'm not quite ready. Annabel will entertain you."

Annabel came out. The sparkle in her eyes and the flush in her cheeks showed that she was excited, despite her effort to appear at ease. Christopher's strange manner had already made me watchful, and I caught the knowing look that Annabel gave him. My heart bounded. Could it be that the queen had decided to renounce her kingdom and go with us? It so deluged me that for a moment I did not heed the chatter proceeding from the other room.

"Choseph!" came thence; "have you neither ears nor a tongue?" The voice rang with a cheer that even Beela's had never known. "Here I've been trying to make you guess why I'm so happy, and you don't show the slightest interest."

"I'd be glad to know," I returned.

"Annabel and her father and Mr. Rawley have decided not to go away, and Annabel and Mr. Rawley are going to be married!" She hurled it breathlessly, as a child in a hurry to tell important news.

So that was the great secret. But why had they kept it from me? An acute silence within accompanied my own. I was smiling at Annabel, who blushed deliciously.

"Christopher!"

"Your Majesty."

"Don't say that. I hate it. Do you love me?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"But you are going to leave me." She said it dolorously.

"No, I ain't, ma'am."

Something was dropped clattering to the floor within, and then came a sudden hush.

There was the queerest, brightest twinkle in Annabel's eyes as she studied me. In astonishment I glanced at Christopher. The look with which he met mine was one of benevolent kindness.

"Dear old Christopher!" came softly from the other room; then, after a pause, "How can Mr. Tudor manage without you?"

"He can't, ma'am." He made the audacious answer while calmly regarding me.

Can it be believed that I dared not see Lentala's challenge, and that something which I could not master held me a silent fool in the chair? Surely there must be men besides me whom love makes humble and timid. I have seen men love with a different measure; I have seen love make them bold and reckless.

Christopher had adroitly seated me with my back to the curtain. Hence I did not see a signal that Annabel, who was facing it, must have received, for with some excuse she withdrew, taking Christopher.

The queen's voice was close to the curtain as she called in a breathless, frightened way, "Choseph!"

"Your Majesty."

Before I could rise she was on me like a whirlwind, clapping her hands over my eyes from behind and pressing me down into the seat. Her cheek rested on my head. I thought the beating of my heart would suffocate me.

During the silence I sat in a trance. One soft hand held my eyes closed; the other slipped down and was pressed on my lips. I knew that Beela had come back, and I would submit to any outrage from her.

"Choseph," she said in her sweet, coaxing voice, "sit still and don't try to speak. You are much more interesting when you don't talk. And then, I don't want to be interrupted, for I'm going to tell you a story. It is about two girls and a man. Nod if you want to hear it."

I nodded.

"The girls are named Beela and Lentala. The man imagines he is or *was* in love with one of those girls." The voice above my head became very impressive. "Now, sir, you are the Man."

Nod.

"We'll easily agree that Lentala is much more dignified and reserved than Beela."

Nod.

"And never so erratic and unconventional."

Nod.

"And that Beela is rude and bold, wears outlandish clothes, and adopts scandalous disguises."

My head was still for a time, so happy was I in her delicious fooling; then I nodded enthusiastically.

I knew she was trying to suppress a laugh; she ostentatiously sighed, and said: "You agree to that. It isn't all. She tells fibs, and is heartless and cruel."

I was motionless for a breathless space, and then nodded viciously. There came a long, still pause. I could bear it no longer.

"Choseph! Stop! You hurt my wrist," and again she held me prisoned. "There. Be quiet. Well," with a resigned sigh, "I suppose the foolish man will keep on loving Beela and hating Lentala, and end by breaking poor Lentala's heart."

I am not positive that I entirely succeeded in suppressing my laugh.

"It has to be Beela, then," the sweet voice went on. "But, Choseph, suppose the madcap should really be very different from what she ever appeared to you, and you should discover that she had deceived you about an important matter,—you can't be certain that you know all her disguises,—wouldn't you think her unworthy of your trust and love?"

A very decided shake, and above me a soft laugh and a little squeeze of my head.

"Choseph, you know you had suspicions about her skill in staining you and Christopher."

I had nearly forgotten it; but as her father had been a white man and her mother a native, her skin would require some staining to look exactly like a native's. I made no response to her speech.

"Choseph, suppose a very little girl born in some

other country had been wrecked with her father on this island. She might have been yellow, or — or almost anything. As she grew, it might have become necessary that she be given the color of the natives." There was a pause, and then came the hurried question, "She'd still be the same girl, wouldn't she?"

I nodded, simply to please her, for her chatter meant no more to me than that Beela was playing and teasing.

"Think, Joseph." She was really serious. "Once, when Lentala dressed like Annabel, you were shocked, and said some strange things that made her very unhappy and uneasy, and she was afraid to tell you the whole truth. And for other reasons she thought it best to keep up the deception. Could *anything* new that you might learn about her change your regard?"

I shook my head, but was puzzled and uneasy.

"Then," she gently said, pressing her sweet cheek to my temple, "it could make no difference at all what her real color is?"

Of course I shook my head. It was impossible for me to accept the absurd suggestion, and my simple lie could do no harm in her pretty play.

She straightened, drawing a deep breath. "That is a promise," she said. "There's something else. Now, no matter if, in showing her love and pity for the poor grown children who need her, she permits these islanders the harmless play of calling her their queen when they mean their leader, their teacher, their mother,— wouldn't she still be only Beela, and none the worse for accepting that love and trust and duty?"

My nod was reverential.

"But, Joseph, she would know her utter inability

to discharge that task. She would stumble; she would fall many a time. There would come dark hours when she yearned in bitter loneliness for the help of a wise head and sure hand; for there is a people to civilize as well as govern. Joseph, the heart of a woman is a woman-heart under either a toy crown or a real one."

I gave no sign. There came a long pause, a deep breath, and a sudden change of tone.

"Joseph, suppose that some day a big, fine cavalier, with a tender heart and a strong hand, should drift to the poor little kingdom and find its queen torturing her soul over problems that would look so large to her and so small to him. It seems to me that he would be moved to offer her his services. She might make him her Prime Minister."

I tore myself loose, rose, and confronted her. Gazing at me was a beautiful young white woman, frightened and blushing, a thousand startled imps dancing in her eyes as she backed away. I was profoundly shocked.

"Forgive me, Joseph." It came tenderly, wistfully, from the perfect lips of Beela and in her dear voice. And those were her eyes; that was her delicate, high-bred nose, and that her light hair. And she was as daintily dressed as ever Annabel had been.

"Choseph!" she cried, stamping in a passion as I gazed in silence.

So overcoming a weakness assailed me that I had to catch the top of a chair.

"Of course I understand," I said, unevenly, and floundered on, with pauses: "I might have guessed, but . . . a cherished ideal is very real to me.

When I lost Beela and found Lentala, I lost what I had come to love. No, not lost,— I am very foolish and blundering."

"No, Joseph." Her smile was dazzling.

"It never could be lost while I lived, and would live had she died. It was Lentala, not Beela, who put Beela away, and then me."

"You know what I thought, Joseph. I meant to be kind. And I never had the least idea until today that Annabel cared for Mr. Rawley. I thought she loved you, and that you had been very fond of her till Beela came. I reasoned that it would be best for you to go to your own country, marry Annabel, and forget Beela."

That sweet speech explained everything, but it was not possible for me to feel the ease in the presence of her radiant loveliness that I had felt toward Beela, the child-woman, the sprite, who could flutter into a man's heart and abide forever. I managed to say bluntly:

"I understand. And now that all is clear, may I stay and do whatever lies in my power and devotion to help you?"

She was regarding me curiously, and with a touch of uneasiness. "Simply because I've asked you?" she demanded.

"It is my dearest wish."

Still the strange look was in her eyes. I dared not interpret it as my heart commanded; I had never loved a woman before, and needed time to gather my courage. Of a sudden an impulse moved me to step forward, take her hands, and look deep into her eyes.

"Let me stay," I begged.

"I'd be glad and proud if you would, Joseph. You

know Captain Mason is to return with the *Hope* as soon as he can, and will bring teachers and a clergyman from America, and Annabel and Mr. Rawley will be married then."

I do not know what it was that she saw — or that her sensitive pride made her see — in my face that made her quickly withdraw her hands and step back as her eyes flashed and her cheeks crimsoned.

"Joseph! I never dreamed that you could think I meant — *that!*"

"It was my love, my joy, dear heart. When the clergyman comes ——"

Annabel and Christopher entered. The queen flew at her, embraced her and kissed her, and then, standing off in front of Christopher, cried in a teasing voice:

"Christopher, you *do* love me, don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," he placidly answered as he set the chairs for luncheon.

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